

THE ARGOSY.

SEPTEMBER, 1884.

THE WHITE WITCH.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ACCIDENT.

IT was Monday morning—as may be remembered. Godfrey Mayne walked slowly home, after seeing the Vicar and his family away on their travels, and a good portion of the rest of the day was spent with his father in the library, examining some accounts. Mary Dixon passed the afternoon in her mother's room, neither of them coming down at all. Two gentlemen called from Cheston, old friends, and stayed a good while with Mr. Mayne and Godfrey.

Dinner was served earlier than usual, Mr. Mayne having promised to preside at a vestry meeting in the absence of the Vicar. As the two ladies rose from table, and Godfrey also, to open the door for them, Mary spoke to him in a whisper as she passed.

"I wish you would do something for me, Mr. Godfrey."

"Certainly I will. What is it?"

She waited until her mother was inside the drawing-room. Godfrey had stepped out and drawn the door to, holding it in his hand.

"I am very uneasy: I'm sure you must have noticed it at dinner; I expected Ernest here this afternoon, and he has not come. Would you mind going as far as the Grange to see if you can learn anything of him?"

"I will go immediately: I'll be back in no time," said Godfrey. Somehow their hands had met, and he was holding her fingers with a tender pressure.

"Thank you," replied Mary; "thank you for *all*."

He started at once. A few paces down the drive he overtook Biddy Milman's cart, driving away with the week's washing.

"Give me a lift, Biddy, I'm in a hurry," said he. And he jumped up and, seizing the reins, prodded and excited the old horse to go along the avenue at quite a dashing pace. He leapt down as the cart turned into the high road, and was running the rest of the way, when he met Colonel Underwood, who was walking to the vestry-meeting.

"*Ernest?*" he exclaimed, in answer to Godfrey's hurried appeal. "Why, what put it into your head that he was coming, Godfrey? He crossed over to Ostend yesterday."

With a sharp, passionate word, for he saw that the girl had dealt treacherously with him, as well as the detective, Godfrey set off back at a pace that amazed the Colonel. He went up the lane, intending to have it out at the farm with Mr. Cattermole, when in turning a curve he came upon the farmer's gig, about to start, the detective and Miss Dixon seated in it. Godfrey seized the horse's head, and Mr. Cattermole flung an oath at him.

"Stand back, Mr. Godfrey, for heaven's sake!" cried Mary. "I am going of my own free will."

"Hold on tight," he called out to her in answer, as he pulled out and opened his pocket knife.

The detective struck the horse with the whip, and then struck at Godfrey; but, at that, Mary turned upon the man with anger, and the lash caught in the harness. The horse started and reared, but Godfrey held fast.

"Will you let go, sir?" roared Mr. Cattermole.

"Not until I have cut the traces."

"Then I must make you. Take that."

There ensued the sharp report of a revolver, and the frightened horse leaped onwards. The traces and back strap, almost cut through, gave way, and the shafts fell. Godfrey staggered and fell with them, face downwards, and lay motionless.

The catastrophe had happened in a few seconds of time. Mary Dixon clung to the seat of the gig in terror. The detaining hand of the detective officer was laid upon her.

She succeeded in pushing his hand away, scrambled out of the gig, knelt down by Godfrey, and strove to turn his face, to see whether life was left in it.

"Help me, help me; come and help me!" she cried passionately, with wide eyes and terror-stricken lips. "He may be alive still. Help me, if you are human, or he will suffocate."

Mr. Cattermole turned Godfrey quickly over, and regarded him attentively. It was dusk, but not yet dark.

"He will be all right soon; he is not dead."

"How dared you shoot him?"

"I did not mean to hurt him, only to frighten him. The fellow should not have interfered. We can escape before anybody comes up," he coolly added. "Come."

"Escape now, and leave him here for dead!" gasped Mary. "What are you thinking of?"

"He is not hurt; he must have fallen from fright. The shot went over his head; it did not touch him."

"Do you call this fright?" said she, shuddering, as a dark-red stain spread the earth where Godfrey lay. "You have murdered

him—you have killed him! Help! help!" she shrieked out at the top of her voice, hoping to be heard: and shouts soon answered from a distance, followed by coming footsteps.

Mr. Cattermole, for reasons no doubt well-known to himself—and who can fathom those of a wily police-detective?—disappeared through a thin place in the hawthorn hedge, cleverly drawing together the branches again to cover the gap his passage had made, just as Ben Griffiths and another young man came running up, one of them having caught the horse. Ben, ready and keen upon any emergency, knelt down over Godfrey and strove to stem with his hands the blood flowing from the wound in his side. Mary rose, making an effort to subdue her agitation.

"You of course know where Dr. Scarsdale lives?" she said to the other lad. "Jump on the horse and go for him. Tell him what it is, and that he must come instantly: it may be a matter of life or death."

The next to appear on the scene was Mr. Mayne. When half way on his road to the church, he had dimly heard the shot and the other sounds, and turned back to ascertain what could be amiss. He at once grew very tiresome. Unable to understand what he saw, or how it had happened, he was beside himself with wondering perplexity; terribly shocked at the state of his son, anxious to do something, yet having nothing to do. Mary (he supposed she had come running to the scene like himself) contrived to take, unseen, a small handbag of hers from the gig and put it under her cloak; and she went with it swiftly into the Abbey.

Farmer Wilding, dressed up in his Sunday's best to attend the parish meeting, for he was churchwarden, came down the lane with a brisk step. He had not heard anything, so that his consternation was excessive. He said that he had lent the gig to his artist lodger, Mr. Cattermole; but what had happened he could not think.

"And Mr. Godfrey with a shot in him!" he exclaimed to Mr. Mayne. "Why then, sir, it must be the doing of some wicked tramp; some footpad, who must have attacked the gig! Perhaps Mr. Godfrey came up at the moment, and got the shot meant for our lodger, who must have resisted."

"But where is the lodger?" cried Mr. Mayne.

"Gone in pursuit, I trust," said the farmer. "Well, this is a dreadful state of things!"

Presently Mary came back again, too uneasy to remain away. Hawkins and the footman had come up, with the housekeeper and others. With a sharply-drawn breath of pain Godfrey at length opened his eyes, and they recognised Mary; who was then bending over him. She softly touched his hand and his fingers feebly clasped hers.

"Let me lie still," he murmured; "I shall soon be all right. Stay with me."

Dr. Scarsdale made good haste and came rattling up the lane in his brougham. Two or three minutes were spent in his examination of Godfrey.

"Whoever it is that has held the wound together, so as to stop the flow of blood, has done good service," he observed. "Perhaps saved his life."

It was Ben Griffiths who had done that. The young man modestly retreated to the back of the group. Mary followed him. She had a gold locket with broad gold chain on her neck, and she took them off and put them into Ben's hands impulsively.

"I can't thank you enough," she whispered, with tears starting to her eyes, in the wild joy she felt at hearing that Godfrey's life was saved. "Keep that, Ben; and if you come to the Abbey to-morrow, I will give you five pounds."

The ready generosity, the gratitude that shone in the lady's lovely eyes, touched the rough and daring young fellow. He would have sold his soul without scruple for her in that moment, and not have minded it. In after life it might be that Ben, if in straits, would pawn his wife's wedding ring; but he would never part with that chain and locket.

When the surgeon had done what he could, Godfrey was taken to the Abbey and borne upstairs to his bed-room. Mrs. Mayne, in a state of intense terror, watched from a distant part of the corridor; but she did not approach. Her lips were white, her tremulous hands would not keep still.

It chanced that nobody was at home at the farm that Monday evening but Mrs. Wilding and her little niece, Susan; Nancy had gone out on an errand, and the servant had a holiday. Mrs. Wilding fell into a doze over the sitting-room fire, and was woken up from it by the return of her husband and daughter. They came in together and in great excitement.

"Why, here you are, sleeping through it all!" cried the farmer. "Don't you know that Mr. Godfrey's been nearly murdered out in the lane there?"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the horror-stricken woman. "Who has done it?"

"Well, I can't make out," said the farmer—as he related the circumstances he knew. "Mr. Cattermole asked me, you know, for the loan of the gig for an hour and started off in it. I should think he was set upon by some desperate jail bird of a tramp; but Ben Griffiths has just whispered to me that he fancies Mr. Cattermole may have fired the shot himself. If so, it must have been in self-defence."

"I don't know that," impulsively spoke up Nancy. "He was too fond of that revolver."

Her father turned round to regard her as he pondered the words. "Cattermole has disappeared somewhere at present, and I can't

question him," he slowly remarked. "Anyway, he does not come inside this house again till he satisfies me as to the facts."

"Has Mr. Cattermole been in, Susan?" asked Nancy, suddenly noticing the girl, and annoyed that so much had already been said before her.

"No, Nancy," said she, trembling.

"And I say he shall not come in again, unless he can give a good account of himself," repeated the farmer sharply. "Run out and shut the front door and draw the bolt, Susan."

The child obeyed hesitatingly. After listening in horror to her uncle's story, she did not even like to go out into the passage alone in the gathering darkness. She was a sturdy-looking girl of about ten, not strongly imaginative by any means, though she was not proof against a little natural nervousness. But a few moments after she had left the room, just as they heard her shut the front door and begin to move the bolt, they were startled by a shrill shriek and the sound of the door flung violently open. Mr. Wilding and Nancy rushed into the passage and found that the child had been thrown to the ground.

"What is it? What was it, Susan?"

But it was some moments before the frightened child could answer. Nancy had picked her up and discovered that she was un-hurt. "It was Mr.—Mr. Cattermole," she sobbed.

But in the meantime the farmer had run straight upstairs and dashed open the door of the artist's room, then his own, Nancy's, and the other rooms in succession. But there was no one in any of them. He came slowly downstairs again. Mrs. Wilding had come into the passage then, and was gently scolding Susan.

"It's nothing but your fancy, child," said she. "It was just Dick, and not Mr. Cattermole at all. I heard his step, I thought, in his room over my head."

"No, you didn't, Martha," corrected her husband. "And who-ever it was must have gone out and not come in, for there's no one at all upstairs."

"He came *in*, and it *was* Mr. Cattermole," sobbed Susan.

At this moment there was a noise outside, and Mr. Mayne's coachman, Barth, with Ben Griffiths and another lad, dashed in without ceremony.

"Have you got him, Mr. Wilding?" asked Barth.

"Got who?"

"The man that shot Master Godfrey—as I believe. We saw him come crouching on this way from the direction of the pond; he made for the door here."

"But he is not here," said the farmer, looking rather troubled. "Who was it?"

"Couldn't make that out; 'twas too dusk," replied Barth. "He turned off into the fold-yard, may be; I did hear the gate go."

The coachman went in pursuit to the fold-yard, the boy following him ; Ben Griffiths, unperceived in the darkness of the passage, had stolen upstairs. Mr. Wilding, with his wife and Susan, returned to the sitting-room, Nancy remaining at the door. Presently Ben came softly down, and strove to pass her.

"Now, what have you been up to ?" demanded Nancy.

"I've been upstairs, looking for the man."

"Looking for what you could lay hold of, more likely," retorted Nancy, who held not too good an opinion of the lad. "What's this?"—drawing out of his pocket a big silk handkerchief, which she recognised as one Mr. Cattermole sometimes wore swathed round his neck. "Where did you get this from ?" she asked sharply.

"Off his neck," coolly replied Ben.

Nancy stared. "Off who's neck ?"

"His," responded Ben. "Upstairs, just now."

"If you don't tell me what you mean, Ben Griffiths, I'll call my father out to you."

"You do, and I'll mix you up in as ugly a business as ever you heard of in all your born days," said Ben viciously.

"What do you mean ?—what business ?"

"Mr. Cattermole's."

"You simpleton, I know all about that. I know who it is he is come here to look after."

"But do you know what for ?"

Nancy looked at him again, keenly, inquiringly.

"Well, I do, that's all," said Ben. "Now you let me go."

He was a well-grown lad of seventeen, and strong as Nancy's own hands were, he could have got away before, but that he did not want her to call her father out to him. In her surprise at the emphasis he gave to this last statement, she released her grasp on him and he went out. Nancy then went upstairs and made a careful examination of the bedrooms, but without finding any trace of the artist's recent presence. For once in her life, the girl was puzzled, and warmly anathematised Ben for a story-teller.

Ben meanwhile went straight to the back-door of the Abbey and asked if he could see Miss Dixon.

"No, I'm sure you can't. What do you want with Miss Dixon ?" asked the maid who came to the door.

"If you just say it's Ben Griffiths that wants her, p'raps she'll see me," said he.

"I don't think she will now. She's with Master Godfrey ; she and Mrs. Garner. They are going to sit up with him."

"Going to sit up with him ! Miss Dixon is ?—are you sure ?" asked he, eagerly.

"Yes. Why, what's that to you ?"

"All right. I'll come to-morrow." And Ben went away.

When Godfrey was laid on the bed in his own room, he missed

Mary. She had walked by his side as they carried him along ; and as they brought him in by the wide hall-door and up the staircase, where he could no longer keep her in sight, he had called to her at intervals, to be sure by the sound of her answering voice that she was still near him and not again in the clutches of that dangerous detective. Of course she had not followed into the bed-room, and Godfrey, in his uneasiness, strove to get off the bed where they had laid him.

"I want Miss Dixon—where is she?" cried Godfrey.

"She can come to you by-and-bye, sir," replied Mrs. Garner. "She is with her mother."

"But I want her here," said Godfrey in excitement, giving way to his inward fears.

"How long do you propose to be under my care?" asked the doctor drily.

"I must be well in a day or two—immediately—so as to be able to travel," answered Godfrey, his face flushing.

"Well, you may give up all thought of that, for you have only to go on behaving as you are doing to be in a fever in twenty-four hours."

Godfrey lay back like a lamb, and submitted to have his wounds examined. He was eager to have the bullet extracted from his side at once, but was told that was impossible. His head had been struck in the fall, no doubt against the shaft, and one of his knees was a little injured.

The worst danger of all might come on from fever, Dr. Scarsdale observed to Mr. Mayne, when he was about to leave his patient, and he must be kept tranquil both in mind and body. If it pleased him to have the young lady by his bed-side—why, let her be so.

Later, Mr. Mayne went and fetched her into his son's room, telling her what the doctor had said and of Godfrey's unaccountably restless anxiety that she should be near him ; which, he candidly added, he could not see any reason in.

"He has no sister, as you know, my dear ; at least not in this country, and he looks upon you as one. I suppose that's it. So stop with him as much as you can, Mary, child ; in a day or two the danger of fever may have passed. Mrs. Garner and some of us will be always in attendance as well, you know."

"I will be with him, dear Mr. Mayne," answered Mary, who quite well understood in her heart why Godfrey feared to have her out of his sight. "I will do for him what I can, as though he were my true brother."

And when she sat down by his bed-side and Godfrey greeted her with a faint smile and put out his shaking hand to imprison hers within it, he whispered a few words.

"You will not go away from me, Mary ; you will sit up with me ?"

And, as Mr. Mayne went out of the room at the moment, and

Mrs. Garner had temporarily left it, so that they were alone, he gently drew her face towards his. From some instinct of gratitude, which suddenly burst out in an uncontrollable impulse, she pushed his fair hair back from his forehead with shaking hand, and pressed her lips to his brow passionately, tenderly. But before he could return the kiss, she had withdrawn her face.

"You are to be still; you are not to move," she whispered: "I was but thanking you. I had got into that gig of my own will, as I told you, yet I am very grateful to you for saving me." Though it is only for the present, she added sadly to herself. "And now we must be quite still. I am your sister, you know, and shall make you obey me."

"I will be still; but you must let me take one brother's kiss in return."

She did not quite like the eager, feverish look in his eyes; so, after a moment's hesitation, and blushing violently, she bent her cheek. Godfrey might have taken but a single kiss; if so, it was a lingering one.

Mrs. Garner came in. Mary sat holding his hand, while he peacefully gazed at her, until he fell asleep. When her own eyes grew heavy and her fragile frame grew limp and weary, the housekeeper, who was a little way off in an arm-chair, came up and softly told her to go and get some rest, while she took her place.

"I can't go. If I took my hand away I'm afraid he would wake up," said Mary.

So Mrs. Garner put a pillow behind her, and within ten minutes the girl had fallen back asleep. When Godfrey woke up early in the night, and the housekeeper gave him some medicine, he found that Mary, asleep with her hand still locked in his, had slipped down on one side in her chair till her hair brushed his pillow. Mrs. Garner drew near to raise her head.

"Don't touch her, don't disturb her," pleaded Godfrey in a whisper. "She's tired out, don't wake her up."

"But she'll feel uncomfortable at being on your pillow, when she does wake up, sir."

"No, no. When I see her opening her eyes, I'll turn the other way." But when the girl did wake up, no scruples of that kind occurred to her to trouble her. The thoughts which instantly filled her mind as she raised herself, stiff and cramped, from her uncomfortable position, were remorse at having proved so bad a nurse and anxiety as to whether he was better. Her hand was still in his, and she knew by his tightened clasp as she moved that he was awake, though his eyes were closed. She bent over him and scanned his face in the dim light; he looked quite peaceful and free from pain, and she drew a breath of relief.

"Give me something to drink, please," he whispered.

Mrs. Garner came forward with it. "And now you must be reason-

able, Master Godfrey," she said, "and let the young lady go away and get a bit of rest herself."

"She has had rest," cried Godfrey, clasping the slender fingers tighter; "she has been asleep."

"That's no rest; sleeping in that cramped position," said the housekeeper positively, whose early sway over Godfrey was not entirely lost yet. "You go into the next room to this, Miss Mary, and lie down. The bed's a beautiful soft bed there and always kept aired and made."

"Yes, it may be better for you, Mary," assented Godfrey. "I must not be too selfish."

Mary did as advised. She was in truth worn out with weariness and the agitation that had preceded it. It was a small, pleasant room, called the blue chamber, from the colour of its furniture. She sank into a dreamless sleep, and awoke in the morning refreshed.

She went at once to Godfrey's door, and was admitted by Mrs. Garner. Dr. Scarsdale had been there and was gone again.

"I am much better, nearly well," said Godfrey in answer to her softly-breathed enquiries. "I could get up if I liked this morning."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Mary in alarm. But the housekeeper, hearing this, laughed to herself. She knew there would be no getting-up for her young master yet.

"Of course I don't mean to," said Godfrey. "I must husband my strength for what I have to do."

"The strength must come back to you first, Master Godfrey."

"You be quiet, Garner. I'm not half as weak as you and old Scarsdale think."

But his voice grew faint as he spoke, and Mary left the room after praying him to be still and cautious. He nodded an assent.

"What does Dr. Scarsdale say?" whispered Mary, drawing the housekeeper outside the door. "Is he in danger?"

"He will go on all right, Miss Mary, if he will but keep tranquil," she answered. "You must please come back by-and-bye and sit with him, for it's only when you are here that he seems at ease."

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE SICK ROOM.

MARY DIXON went straight downstairs, from the sick chamber, to the breakfast room. The breakfast bell had rung, and Mr. Mayne did not like to be kept waiting. Her mother was also at the table.

Not for a single minute during the meal did Mr. Mayne cease talking of the event of the previous night. Scarsdale had again asked him, and before Godfrey, he said, how it had happened, and he could not give him any satisfactory answer. The doctor observed that a person had told him it was in some way connected with the

Scotland-yard police, upon which Godfrey had spoken up, and said "What nonsense!" He, Mr. Mayne, felt sure it would turn out to be the work of a footpad. The fellow had attacked the gentleman in the gig—an artist, lodging at Wilding's—and, upon meeting with resistance must have fired upon him. Godfrey, unluckily passing through the lane at the moment, had received the shot.

This was what Mr. Mayne said to the doctor, and now said to his wife and Mary, little thinking how much the latter had had to do with the affair. And it was the version, garbled in various ways, that obtained credence in the neighbourhood. Nobody, except Godfrey, had seen Mary in the gig, so her name was not mixed up with the matter at all, indoors or out.

Poor Mrs. Mayne had sat in evident dread as she listened to her husband, her thin lips drawn into a line, her plump hands trembling. Mary said nothing, and strove to eat.

After breakfast, when Mary was passing through the hall on her way to her room, one of the maids came to her to say that Ben Griffiths was asking leave to speak to her; that he would not go away and said she had promised to see him.

"Ben Griffiths!" exclaimed Mary, whose thoughts were elsewhere. "Oh, yes, yes, I remember," she added in a moment. "Show him into the refectory, Emily, and I will come to him."

Mary went to her room, took some gold from her purse, which had been well-filled for the journey on which she had been starting the night before, and ran down again.

"Good-morning, Ben," said she kindly. "I might have given you at the time what I promised you last night, but I was too bewildered to remember that I had my purse about me."

"It was not that I came for, miss," said the lad, shifting from one foot to another, and avoiding her eyes with all the signs which are generally supposed to indicate extreme shyness, self-consciousness, or the confirmed evil-doer.

"No! Well, you must let me take this opportunity of thanking you for the pluck and energy you showed last night, and the help you gave, and you must let me give you what I promised."

She put the five sovereigns into his hand with a gracious, winning manner that made her seem like some unreal creature of a different, brighter world to rough Ben, who looked at her slim white fingers as if they were something a human touch would break.

"Thank you, miss," said he shyly. And then, after a little more hesitation, a little more shuffling about, he took from his cap and thrust out towards her a folded piece of paper.

It was an old letter. She took it from him, saw that it was in her own handwriting, that the heading was Naples, the date of more than two years ago, and cried out against her will. For it spoke of matters that no stranger's eye ought to see. Controlling herself by an effort, she read it through.

"How did you get this, Ben?" she asked quietly.

"I found it under the hedge between the avenue and the field yonder, miss, with a handkerchief and a pocket-knife. I expect the things must have fallen out of some man's pocket. And after I had picked them up and was running away, I saw this as well."

It was another note which Ben handed to her. One more recently written, and addressed to Miss Dixon. Mary knew it for the writing of Mr. Cattermole.

"But when did you find these?"

"On Friday morning, miss. I had seen Dick Wilding looking and searching about, so I thought I'd look too; and I suppose my eyes were keener than his. If they didn't fall out of Dick's pocket," went on Ben, in a curious tone, "maybe they fell from the painter's—Mr. Cattermole."

"Then why did you not give them back to Mr. Cattermole?"

Ben shuffled his feet about and looked uncomfortable. "Your name being there, miss, I thought I'd better give 'em first to you."

"You read these letters, Ben?"

"Yes, miss," in a strangled voice. Then quickly: "I couldn't help it: but I'll be shot if I'd ever repeat a word that's in them—and I don't rightly understand, either. I'd be true to you always, miss."

The tears rose to Mary's eyes. She knew that the letters had told the shrewd young Northerner too much: but yet—wanting the clue—he—

"You don't think I would, miss, do you?" interrupted Ben eagerly.

"No, Ben, I do not. I know that I may trust you," she said, taking his rough, hard-working hand into hers. But neither Mary nor Ben noticed that Nancy's face, staring in at the open window, made an astonished third at the interview.

"I'd like to say another thing, miss," said Ben, regarding Mary with grateful reverence. "I beg pardon, but is not your room next to the schoolroom, where I put up the bars on Sunday evening? Well, I'd take the liberty, miss, of advising you to get into another room and not sleep there any longer. One on 't'other side the house."

"But why do you say this?" questioned Mary, looking at him.

"Well, miss, there's—there's—all sorts o' things said about them two rooms, the schoolroom and yours," spoke Ben, with as much hesitation as if he were taxing his invention. "Ghosts, and that. *Don't you stay in 'em, miss.*"

Ben pulled his hair by way of salutation, after his emphatic speech, once more thanked the young lady for her liberal kindness, and went away. Mary remained a few minutes in anxious thought and then went up to her room.

She looked about carefully. Some stranger had evidently been there, for on the dressing-table, pushed partly underneath one of the ornaments, was a scrap of paper bearing these words:

"I am not to be trifled with; therefore see to it."

Any of the maids, reading it in curiosity, could have made nothing out of the mandate, but Mary knew the handwriting and shivered. He must have contrived to place it where it lay: shrewd Ben did well to warn her from the room.

Traversing the gallery, passing her mother's door with soft step, lest she should be heard and called to, Mary hastened to the sick chamber. Godfrey lay on the pillow with wide-open eyes, impatient for her return.

"Oh, Mary, what a long while you have been!" he cried. "You must have been eating ten breakfasts instead of one. What is the matter with you?—you look frightened," he continued anxiously.

"No," she answered, as she sat down by him: though very conscious that she lived in a chronic state of fright now. "I am but a little out of breath; I came along quickly, fearing you might think I was neglecting you."

"It isn't selfishness that makes me keep you with me, Mary," said he earnestly. "I know while you are here you are safe. But if, when you are out of the room, I hear a voice raised or a door shut, I think you have been carried away—and—and—Mary, promise me you will not let them take you away while I am lying ill here and cannot stop it. You could not have the heart to leave me now in this state, could you?"

"No, no," said she, with the tears coming. "You may be sure of that. While you are so ill I will stay with you."

"And when I am well?"

"When you are well you shall—shall—know more than you do now," she answered, fearing for his agitation. "But now you are to keep quiet and not excite yourself, and I will read to you."

"Reading aloud is tiring; and you only want to do it to keep me from talking," returned Godfrey. "How could you run away as you did, without a word of notice or of farewell to me?"

"I had left a note for you, Godfrey."

His eyes lighted. "Where is the note? Let me have it."

"The note is torn up. As I came back, it was useless, you know."

"Won't you tell me what the mystery is—and why you must go?"

"I cannot tell you; especially now that you are ill: it would excite and injure you. The time may come when I shall tell you all. Mamma urged me to go."

"Were you going to escape out of England, with that man?" he asked, making the tones of his faint voice even lower. Mrs. Garner was at the far end of the room, busy with some tea cups.

"No, no, no," returned Mary with emotion; "never that. I was but going to London—to friends who live there."

"He spoke to me about carrying you off to America."

She passed her hand across her brow, as though it were aching, and bit her trembling lips.

"There is great trouble," she whispered, bending over him, "and

I am not able to explain to you what it involves. A detective officer is powerful, you know,"—with a sad smile—"and we may not lightly resist him, or his decrees either."

"Why did he say it was to America he meant to take you?"

"A detective has to invent fables as well as other people," she answered, after a pause. "But, Godfrey, you must please to drop this subject: it is too exciting; if you persist in pursuing it, I must leave you alone. And I cannot tell you more about it at all."

Godfrey gave a sort of groan. "You are tired, I know, Mary; sit you down in that easy chair, and lean back."

She obeyed him in silence. Mrs. Garner came up to look at him, and then went back again.

"I want to ask you a question, Mary," he began, in a low voice, pulling his moustache nervously. "Give me your hand first." She did so at once, but rather timidly. "You know that evening last week, Wednesday evening, I think it was, when we had that long talk in the drawing-room, before Nancy came to the Abbey with your bracelet?"

"No; I—I don't particularly remember it."

"Yes, you do. We were talking about—love, and about getting married, and we didn't agree at all. Do you still think a person ought to take a husband or a wife just as they would take a cup of coffee?"

"I never said that."

"No; but you thought a man ought to say to himself: 'Here is a nice lady-like girl; I will fall in love with her and marry her,' and you were very severe on the poor fellows who get excited about it. Do you *still* think the same?"

"Yes, yes; I think just what I thought then," replied Mary, restlessly trying to get away.

"Stay by me one moment," pleaded he, his eyes shining with the love light, his voice very low and gentle. "I will only keep you a few minutes, Mary, and I won't say anything to hurt you. Suppose a girl were in some great danger, which she could only escape from by going away; and suppose a man whom she didn't care particularly about, whom at one time she had disliked, in fact"—involuntarily her fingers tightened their clasp of his—"but who knew her tastes, and—and wasn't very old or very ugly, suppose he were ready to give his life, his health, his comfort, his happiness—anything—to save her. Well, and supposing he was ready to go anywhere, to do anything, to watch and to work all day and all night for her protection and comfort, to take care that she shouldn't ever have time to think of hateful, unpleasant things she wanted to forget, and supposing she knew he wasn't the kind of fellow to change—don't you think, in time, she'd get to like him?"

"No, no," said Mary, trying to draw her trembling hand away, while the tears ran down her cheeks, "I'm sure she couldn't. She would only think him very silly."

"Yet you have seemed to like me better lately, Mary," sighed Godfrey, letting her fingers go reluctantly. "Don't cry, my darling," said he, stretching out his arm to touch her with an impulse of passionate tenderness: she was not cold to him, or hard to him, she was only pitifully unhappy. "You are afraid you have hurt me, and you are sorry. I know you think kindly of me, you trust me; you do care whether I live or die."

She turned her soft brown eyes, troubled now, upon him, and her cheek touched the loving hand he had laid upon her shoulder.

"Yes, I do care," she whispered; "but I—I am afraid of you."

With a faint cry of rapture, Godfrey drew her hand to his breast. But Mary checked him.

"Do not mistake me," she said, striving to be calm. "You know what our agreement was—that we would be as brother and sister. It is impossible that we can be anything more to each other than that. Do you think I should sit by you here, and talk to you as I do, but for knowing that, positively, and—and feeling it? Dear Godfrey, it may be a little—trial—to you, but trials of one kind or other come to us all. You must not speak of this again."

Just for the present there was no opportunity for Godfrey to rebel. Dr. Scarsdale was coming up the stairs to pay his second visit that morning. Another accompanied him, a renowned man in surgery.⁰²

Some days passed on. The affair had caused, naturally, great commotion throughout the neighbourhood. Godfrey was a favourite, and people were loud in expressing their indignation. The local police authorities sent out men to hunt up footpads. Mr. Mayne, more fussy than usual, was kept by his wife from stirring in it actively; to do so, she pointed out to him, would only increase Godfrey's risk of fever; he at first talked of sending, like his friend, Hunt, for help from Scotland Yard. Mr. Cattermole had reinstated himself in the farmer's good will by a very plausible story. He upheld the popular tale of the footpad's attack upon him, and said that his revolver, fired in self-defence, unfortunately struck young Mr. Mayne, instead of the right man. He had chased the fellow, he added, through the gap in the hedge, and over fields, and down lanes, but had lost him at last in the growing darkness. Mr. Cattermole kept himself very quiet, in doors, in those days, ostensibly occupying his time in painting, and in laughing at little Susan's having said he had come in and rushed past her in the passage, frightening the child much in assuring her it must have been the ghost of the dead monk. At dusk he would go out for a stroll; and twice over, Nancy Wilding, whose eyes and mind were all curiosity just then, saw him meet Mrs. Mayne, and stop to speak to her.

Midst other friends who came driving to the Abbey with their condolences, were Sir William and Lady Hunt. Mrs. Mayne did not come down to receive them, but Miss Dixon did. Her mother was sadly fatigued, she pleaded, with her ministrations to Mr. God-

frey (they had not been many), but would see Lady Hunt in her dressing-room. Accordingly Lady Hunt went up to it, and found Mrs. Mayne lying on the sofa, looking very poorly indeed, and with a worried look in her eyes.

Lady Hunt was leaving for London on the morrow; she had had quite enough of Goule Park at present, she told Mrs. Mayne. Her husband would take her to London, stay there a day or two, and then return. She was not taken in to see Godfrey, neither was Sir William, as it was necessary to keep him absolutely quiet, so she stayed in the dressing-room talking with Mrs. Mayne and Mary.

"Is your detective officer down here yet?—the one you said you had sent to Scotland Yard for?" asked Mr. Mayne, when alone with his old friend.

Sir William dropped his voice and put on a mysterious air. "He is down here, Mayne; but keeping himself incog.: I may tell you so much in confidence. Nobody knows that he is here, not even my wife. She has her prejudices, you know. I have held one or two private conferences with him."

"But why should he be here incog.?" asked Mr. Mayne.

"He has his reasons you may be sure: he is the most astute detective in the force. The track that he is following up—a very difficult track indeed he tells me—might be lost if it were known who he is. We have been looking for these people from two to three years in vain," added Sir William, "and though we are now certainly upon their trail, precaution is needful."

"I can fully believe that," assented Mr. Mayne.

"She looks really ill, William, and so worried," observed Lady Hunt to her husband of Mrs. Mayne when they had driven away. "I don't wonder at her not being equal to visiting just now."

Thus a week wore away. Under the treatment of the skilful surgeons and the attentive care of Mrs. Garner, and of Hawkins, who helped in the nursing, Godfrey was recovering quickly. The only anxiety remaining was a tendency to lightheadedness, which kept manifesting itself occasionally. Mary often sat by him, but she would not allow a relapse to any conversation that might not be spoken openly. She grew more sad, more troubled, day by day. Even her mother she seemed to shun now; whenever an interview took place between them, Mary came from it with red eyes.

One afternoon when it was growing late, and Mary chanced to be alone with Godfrey, who was supposed to be asleep, he suddenly looked up and put a question to her.

"Do you still think of going away?"

"Yes; I must go. It will be better—safer."

"Better to go with that man than to stay here with me!" he exclaimed. "Why if I were a raving lunatic, I tell you, Mary, you would be safer with me than with him. He is a worse man than you think; I am sure of it. Better give yourself up at a police-

station, charging yourself with all the crimes that were ever committed, than accompany him. I know him, and I am sure of it ; I see what he is. Promise me that you will not trust him."

"I trust no one in the world so well as you," said she gravely. And the words without satisfying set him trembling with sudden pleasure, of which she took advantage to quiet him by threats of leaving the room if he talked and excited himself any more.

"No, no, I won't excite myself. Look here—I have been thinking, Mary. You say that you will be safer away from the Abbey, that you have to leave it ? "

"Yes."

"Well, I have planned it all out. I am getting rapidly better, shall soon be well, as you know ; well enough to travel, at any rate. I will take you away to London, to Mrs. Penteith ; she will protect you from all harm for my sake, I know that. You will be as sure and safe in her house as if you were in some uninhabited land, and you can be sheltered there until these difficulties, whatever they may be, shall have blown over."

"Your aunt lives in Liverpool."

"Just now she is in London ; she went up to stay with her late husband's sister, Lady Anne Northstone, in Eaton Place. Lady Anne, who is quite an old lady, is gone to Mentone for her cough, and my aunt thinks of remaining in her house for the winter."

"Eaton Place, did you say ? "

"Yes," replied Godfrey, and mentioned the number, which Mary made a mental note of. "Don't you think that will be a very good plan ? " he added, looking at her with eyes anxious for her answer.

"Oh, very good," replied Mary with ready cheerfulness, inwardly wishing it could be carried out, but knowing, alas, that it could not be. "How good of you to think of it, Godfrey ! "

His mind was set at rest, and he fell asleep. Mary sat with her gaze fixed upon his face curiously, kindly, until a smile curved the corners of her mouth and the tears welled up to her eyes.

I could have loved him, I could have loved him, she thought to herself, as her face stole nearer to his in the dim light of the shaded room until, frightened by a longer-drawn breath from the sleeper, she drew back hastily and ashamed, got up, crept to one of the windows, and looked out round the blind on to the garden and the dark plantation beyond, wrapt in the growing mist of an autumn afternoon. . But she could not keep her eyes long away from that sleeping face on the pillow. She wondered whether all men looked so much better and handsomer when they were asleep than when they were awake ; for to her this fair-faced, fair-haired young Englishman, lying there so tranquilly, seemed to be transfigured to a creature of ideal nobleness and beauty whom she looked at with reverence and remorse. His devoted love for her, which she might never return, bewildered, touched, awed her. Nay, a still small

voice was whispering to her that she loved him in return. And yet, nothing could come of it, nothing but misery; she must hide herself from him as from the rest of the world.

She slid on to her knees beside his bed and prayed—whether for him or to him she was not quite sure. And while she still knelt, her mother came softly in. Mrs. Mayne had been very little in the sick-room, and now she gave only one look at Godfrey as she laid her hand on her daughter's shoulder and made her rise. She was looking anxious, as usual, but angry too.

"Come to my room, Mary; I want to speak to you."

"Not now, mamma. I promised to stay here till he woke up."

"But I insist. It is important."

"I will come as soon as he wakes."

Then her mother began to cry, but her tears did not move the girl to-day. "You are in love with him!" sobbed Mrs. Mayne below her breath.

"Hush! hush!" said the girl, flushing as she glanced at him, "I am not indeed: and if it were so, where would be the use of it?" she added passionately. "Don't be afraid, mamma: I shall do for you what I have promised to do. Mrs. Garner will be here soon with his tea, and then I will come to you."

When she reached her mother's room, the latter handed her a note. Mary read it quietly. "You have seen him, mamma, to-day?"

"For two minutes only; I met him in the plantation, and he asked me to give you that. He is still very miserable about the accident."

"Accident?" said the girl drily.

"Yes, yes, it *was* an accident. Of course he did not intend harm. His elbow slipped."

Mary had much ado to keep back the retort that rose to her lips. "He says he wants to see me for a few minutes," she observed, glancing again at the note. "He asks me to meet him in the Avenue after dinner."

"And you will go, will you not?"

"Yes, I will go," repeated Mary slowly. "It will be safe, I suppose. He cannot well attempt to run away with me by force; or to shoot me——"

"How dare you say such things, Mary?—when you know that his protection is, of all, the best for you!" interrupted Mrs. Mayne.

Dinner over, Mary put on a shawl and garden-hat, slipped out of doors by way of the refectory, went round through the garden to the front of the house, and walked quickly down the drive that led to the Avenue. It was growing dark, and lights were gleaming from the Abbey windows. When she reached the Avenue she peered along it and could see no one. Presently she crossed the road into the wood which covered the slope on the one side, and crept along, under cover of the trees and bushes, towards the high-road.

She had not gone far before she saw in the darkness under the trees of the avenue, a horse and vehicle of some kind, standing on the other side of the road. For a moment her heart stood still; then, creeping cautiously on, she recognised Mr. Wilding's gig in which she had sat some evenings before, and she saw that the person in it was Dick. She was on the point of hailing him as a friend, when a man who was standing on the other side of the horse, watching the meadow over the hedge, turned and came up to him.

"And you'll take her away safe from the devil, won't you?" said the lad, in a loud hissing whisper that Mary heard distinctly.

"Yes, yes, I'll take care of her and save her from him," answered Mr. Cattermole's voice. "You had better get down, Dick, and go along the avenue and see if the young lady's coming that way. Don't let them see you from the house, or the devil might send out to have us caught, and we should not be able to save her."

"All right," said Dick; and, jumping down, he ran quickly and lightly along the road in the direction in which she had come.

This manœuvre was to get rid of Dick, in the expectation of her coming across the meadow by the foot-path. Mary knew it was the way her mother had told her to come, and she did not like it. She turned and crept back, going a little further down into the wood, lest the sound or sight of the moving bushes should attract the officer's attention. Her return took some time; and when at last she got opposite to the Abbey drive, Dick, lurking about in the road above, heard her as she crept up, darted in among the trees, dragged her out with his indomitable strength, and with pleasure and pride in his capture, began to pull her energetically along towards the gig.

"Let me go, Dick, let me go," she whispered imploringly, not daring to raise her voice, lest Mr. Cattermole should hear.

"It's all right, it's all right; he's there, and we're going to save you—save you from the devil," said Dick triumphantly, still dragging her along.

She fell down on her knees and faltered out, "Dick, Dick, I don't want to go. I want to go back to the—to the devil," with wild earnestness so unmistakable that the half-witted lad paused and looked down at her in a bewildered manner. "There's a good, good Dick?" said she, as she sprang away towards the Abbey.

But Mr. Cattermole had left the gig, and was walking along the avenue to reconnoitre. He caught sight of her at that moment, flying from him, and he set off in pursuit at the top of his speed. Fortunately for her, his feet were still somewhat crippled, but he followed her, inciting the puzzled Dick to do the same, to within a dozen yards of the Abbey-door, at which she rang the bell violently, trembling lest even there she should be caught and torn away. But, that, even the detective officer did not dare attempt, and she almost threw herself into the arms of Hawkins as he opened the door. Mr. Mayne came out of the dining-room.

"Why, where have you been?" he cried in amazement. "How can you dare go out by yourself when the parish is full of cut-throats and foot-pads? It is very imprudent, Mary. And there's Godfrey been asking for you a dozen times, and working himself into a fever when they could not find you and told him you must have gone out for a 'turn in the fresh air!'"

Mary went straight to Godfrey's room to reassure him, throwing off her hat and cloak in the corridor. He was sitting up in bed, his arms held out, his cheeks aflame, and his eyes wild.

"You are in pain," spoke Mary, as gently as she could for her quick breath. "You should not be so anxious, Godfrey."

But Godfrey, with a faint cry of joy, had let his head fall upon her shoulder. Mr. Mayne stared a little. Garner seemed to regard it as nothing particular.

"Sick folk will have their fancies, you know, sir," she said to her master. And, with that, Godfrey let his head fall back to its proper resting place, the pillow.

Mrs. Mayne had offered to sit up with Godfrey that night, so that Garner might take some needful rest. Mary rather opposed this; she thought her mother was not in a condition of health to risk the loss of a night's sleep with impunity; but Mrs. Mayne was, as usual, determined. So Mary resolved to sit up herself in the next room, so as to be at hand to call assistance in case Mrs. Mayne felt tired or faint. Godfrey was ill at ease this night; as might be known by his sighs and restless movements.

About ten o'clock the house settled down for the night. Mrs. Mayne took up her watch in the sick chamber; Mary went into the blue one adjoining it. While ostensibly keeping to her own room, and using it in the day-time for dressing purposes, she had continued to sleep in the blue chamber since the first night when Garner sent her to it. No one knew of this except Garner and the housemaids; Mary had not mentioned it to her mother.

She took off her dress, nothing else, and put on a warm dressing-gown, lying down then upon the bed, and drawing the counterpane over her. Nothing could have been further from her intention than to go to sleep; she lay down because she was so exhausted and weary, but she meant to keep awake and listen. The result was a very common one: in ten minutes she was asleep.

Something awoke her, in how short or long a time afterwards she did not know, and she lay listening. There was no sound to be heard, and she supposed she had awoke simply from her own anxiety of mind. Slipping off the bed, she went into the corridor and listened at Godfrey's door. Hearing her mother stirring about, she knocked very gently.

"Who is there?" whispered Mrs. Mayne through the key-hole.

"It is I, mamma."

"You!" exclaimed Mrs. Mayne, as she drew the door open and

came out. "What brings you here, Mary? — what do you want?"

"I only just came out of my room to see if you needed anything. How is Godfrey?"

"Godfrey is all right; he is in a sound sleep. Where are you sleeping?" continued Mrs. Mayne, struck by a sudden idea.

"In the blue-room: the one next to this."

"Go back to it at once, Mary: you must need rest."

To enforce obedience, she took her daughter's hand and led her into the chamber. Failing to persuade her to undress, Mrs. Mayne saw her lie down, and, in going out, she made an attempt to take out the key to lock the door on the outside. But Mary was too quick for her; in an instant she was off the bed and had seized the key. Her mother laughed nervously.

"I wanted to force you to get some rest, instead of wandering about the gallery disturbing Godfrey," said she.

"Very well, mamma, I won't disturb him again," said Mary.

But the girl's senses were now all alert. Instead of lying down again, she sat back in a chair, and unlatched her door, the better to listen. Some instinct seemed to whisper her that Godfrey was worse; might want better attention than her mother was able to give; but she could not at all account for the feeling.

Presently, in the still silence of the night, Mary fancied she heard a sound in the gallery, as of cautious steps stealing along it. Then she heard a single, faint knock at Godfrey's door. The door was noiselessly opened to admit somebody, and then closed again.

Away went Mary, softly knocking in her turn. Her mother came out. "Is Godfrey worse?" asked the girl. "Is it Mrs. Garner who is gone in to him? Did you call her?"

Before Mrs. Mayne could answer, she was pushed further out, the door was closed by someone inside, and the key turned. The thought that crossed Mary was, that her mother had committed some frightful mistake in the nursing, and that Garner had taken the liberty of locking her mistress out.

"Who else should it be but Garner?" cried her mother fretfully. "You are too ridiculous, Mary. Come back to your room."

She stepped briskly towards it, over the carpeted corridor. Before following her, Mary bent her lips to the door, with a whisper.

"Is he worse, Garner? Is anything wrong?"

"No, he is not worse," answered a soft, masculine voice, which Mary knew too well, as the door of the room was opened, and Mr. Detective Cattermole came forth from it.

"I must speak with you," he whispered with stern authority, laying his hand upon her shoulder.

Mary shivered. "Speak?" she said. "What is it?"

"Not here. We might be overheard. Come downstairs with me." Yielding to the mysterious power which he possessed over her, she

let him lead her to the staircase ; but in the same moment she fancied she heard a faint cry in Godfrey's voice : "Help, help!"

"Go to him," called out Mary to her mother. "Can you not speak here?" she added to the detective as they neared the refectory.

"No. It is safer out of doors." He went on into the garden, halting in a sheltered spot under some trees. Mary had caught up a shawl hanging in the passage, and put it over her head.

"What is the meaning of this prolonged delay?" he questioned. "You know the peril that threatens. We ought to have been off days ago."

"I told you I would not go until Godfrey Mayne was out of danger."

"Or dies, I suppose?" interrupted Mr. Cattermole with callous mockery.

"And I will not," she went on. "It was in our cause—say mine if you like—his life was imperilled ; the least I can do is to stay by him until he is safe."

"I am told he *is* safe."

"I believe he is. Or nearly so."

"And when will you be ready?"

Mary hesitated. "I cannot trust you," she said. "You would have taken me away by force to-night, after getting me out by stratagem. I saw the gig waiting."

"And for whose benefit?" he retorted. "Do you no longer want to save your mother? Not for a single day is there safety. Each day as it rises, I say to myself, "By night the worst may have happened. You must fix, now, the time and hour of escape, and keep it."

Mary sighed. "I *will* escape ; I will keep my word. To-morrow you shall have the time from me."

"No," said he, "I will not trust you till to-morrow. You must fix it now."

She might have wrung her hands in distress but for fearing to anger him to passion. That she must keep her word, she knew.

"I will say to-morrow afternoon. In time to catch the five o'clock train."

"The evening will be better, on account of its being dusk."

"But I should not reach London in reasonable time. If we cannot get the five o'clock train, I will not go until the next day. Now let me go back please."

"You will keep your word?"

"I will," she answered. "Good night."

He released his hold of her, and she ran back like the wind. Mrs. Garner was coming forth from Godfrey's chamber with a horror-stricken face.

"What is amiss?" gasped Mary.

"The bandages have been loosened from the wound : torn off, as it looks like," answered the dismayed housekeeper. "If we can't help him he will bleed to death."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE POLICE.

MRS. GARNER flew along the gallery, calling out for Hawkins, for William, for anybody to run to one of the grooms, and send him galloping for Dr. Scarsdale. Godfrey's room was all in darkness. Mary rushed to his bedside : he was insensible, and his face was wet and cold. She shrieked out as she bent over him. The discovery had filled her with unutterable horror.

Mrs. Mayne came first to the room, stealing in with trembling steps, and asking in a timid tone what was the matter.

" You have let him kill him," answered Mary. " He has torn off the bandages."

" Oh, Mary, no ; how can you imagine anything so dreadful ? " wailed the poor lady, in piteous terror. " Godfrey must have got the bandages loose in his restlessness."

" Did you not hear me call to you to go to Godfrey ? "

" But I only thought you wanted me to make a third at your interview in the corridor, and I knew it was as well I should not," she explained. " I have been shut up in your room, waiting for you."

Old Hawkins, in picturesque undress, came running with a light. Other servants followed with more lights. Mr. Mayne appeared last, quite beside himself with it all. For once he was roused out of his placidity, and spoke with a voice of thunder.

" The bandages loosened ! " he exclaimed. " Who has done this ? "

Mary, her face white and rigid, stepped forward to speak ; but Mrs. Mayne put her aside, confronting her husband with some uncertain words.

" Poor Godfrey must have done it himself," she said ; " he is very restless. I thought he was asleep, and went into Mary's room to get a book to read, and so while away the time here. Perhaps—perhaps"—her white lips and her hands were shaking—" he missed me from the room, and strove to get up, and so—and so—"

" But was it you that called to me, ma'am ? " Garner asked.

" No, I did not call ; I did not know anything was amiss till a minute ago," answered Mrs. Mayne.

Garnet had lain down in a chamber near, leaving its door open to the corridor. Her account was that she had been aroused out of her sleep by the cry of an anxious voice, saying, as she thought, " Go to him ! " She listened for a minute or two, but heard no more, and supposed it might have been only a dream. Then she grew uneasy, and thought it might be as well to see if all was right in the sick chamber. She found its door locked on the outside, which surprised her ; turning the key, she went in and found the chamber all in darkness. Mr. Godfrey did not answer her when she spoke ; his face was

still and cold ; and then she found out what the matter was—the bandages had been burst open.

This appeared to be the only account that any of them could give ; and as it was impossible to suppose that the damage was caused wilfully, or indeed that anybody could have been there to do it, the theory of Godfrey's own restlessness was adopted as an established fact. Mary's presence before the alarm was not suspected. All that could be done for him before Dr. Scarsdale's arrival was done. The bandages were replaced, and means taken to revive the patient. Then the room was cleared, leaving only Mrs. Garner and Mary in it.

"Stay by him for a little while if you don't mind, my dear," said Mr. Mayne to his step-daughter. "There's a look of dreadful anxiety in his eyes as they follow you about. I can't make it out, I'm sure, or what it is he wants."

"Am I dying ?" Godfrey presently asked her, in faint tones, as she bent over him.

"No, no, I trust not. How did it happen," she whispered.

He took time to consider. "I was asleep : your mother was sitting in the chair yonder. Then I awoke and heard some whispering in the room, just inside the door. I raised my head to look, and saw *him* there—that man, Mary ! "

"Yes," she faintly answered.

"I cried out ; I asked what he wanted. Then I heard a knock at the door, and your mother opened it, and I saw him push her out and turn the key upon her. He came to the bedside, and we had a sort of struggle ; I forgot how weak I still was, and would have struck him. In the scuffle the bandages were torn ; I know he did it, but I don't know that he meant to harm me ; he was in a foaming passion. He went out of the room then, and I heard him put the key in the lock outside and lock me in ; I cried out for help ; at least, I think so ; but I don't remember clearly, and after that I know no more. Oh, my darling, my darling," he wailed out in pain, "has the crisis come ? What is to become of you ? How can you escape that dangerous man ? "

Mary let her cool cheek rest for a moment on his anxious face, now a scarlet hectic. "I can only trust in God," she said. "He has taken care of me hitherto ; He may take care of me to the end."

Godfrey kissed her lips. "Be mine," he whispered. "We could be married, here, at the bed-side ; it only needs a special licence. Mary, Mary, be my wife ! I should then have a right to protect you."

She burst into sobs. Hot tears rained from her eyes. "It cannot be : there is an insuperable obstacle. Oh, Godfrey, believe me ; what I have always said is true. You and I can never be anything more to each other than brother and sister."

The damage done to Godfrey by the loosening of the bandages was not so great as feared : though it would undoubtedly have killed him, Dr. Scarsdale said, had not the prompt discovery taken place.

"There's a Providence ruling over all things," said the surgeon, in reverent sententiousness. "That call which Mrs. Garner heard might have been only fancy, as she says; but it brought to him the needed help."

The household agreed with this—partially. "I say it must have been a ghost crying out," remarked Lydia, and she carried the belief of the servants with her. "The Abbey lately has been full of nothing but ghosts and mysteries."

The first thing Mary did the following morning was to write a short note to Mr. Cattermole, which she sent to the farm under cover to Nancy. In it she told him that she must retract her promise of the previous night, and further delay for a few days the step which he required her to take. Dangerous sickness again reigned at the Abbey: none could know better than Mr. Cattermole what had renewed it: the fault of the delay therefore lay with him, and not with herself.

"And now I must lay my own plans," reflected Mary, after despatching the note. "I must contrive to get away alone, for I dare not trust myself with him. He has nearly murdered Godfrey twice over in his passion; he might murder me if he fell into one, should I cross him. Mamma will be desperately angry with me, and perhaps —"

Here Mary came to a sudden pause. A thought had struck her.

"Why need I tell mamma at all? Dear mamma! she will say it is treachery; but I must think a little of myself, and she has been hard upon me lately. Naturally she thinks if anybody has to be sacrificed it is I. But I cannot and will not do quite all she wishes; I would rather die. No, I must keep it from mamma; what I do, I must do alone."

Two or three days went on. Godfrey grew so much better as to be pronounced out of danger, and was allowed to sit up a little. Mary saw that the time for action had come: she must put in practice what she had resolved upon. Entirely without aid she could not get away, and she had decided to trust Ben Griffiths, believing he would be true and silent. The first person she had thought of was Nancy Wilding, so keen and capable: but Nancy lived too near Mr. Cattermole, and a chance word might be dropped.

While she was pondering how to get speech of Ben without exciting suspicion, it seemed that luck was favouring her, for Ben came up to the Abbey with a message from his father about the horses. After delivering it to Hawkins, Ben was going away whistling, when Mary called to him from one of the refectory windows.

"Would you come in here, Ben, for a minute," she said.

He came in, doffing his old cap. "Yes, miss," said he.

"Ben, I—I want you to do something for me; I want you to help me. Will you?"

"That I will, miss. You've only got to say what's to do."

"But I want to *trust* you, Ben. It is a secret, and must not be talked of. Will you keep it strictly for me?"

"Never nobody kept nothing stricter in this world than I'll keep it," said Ben, with honest eagerness. "I'd go through fire and water for you, miss, if need be, and never tell."

Mary smiled, and saw that she might implicitly trust him. She proceeded to tell him that she had a reason for wishing to leave the Abbey for a short while, but that it was not expedient anybody should know of her going until she was safely gone: in short, that she wanted to get away in secret. And she asked Ben whether he could borrow some vehicle in which he could drive her to Cheston Station to take the train. Neither of them noticed Nancy Wilding peering in at one of the windows after Ben. She had seen him go in, and wondered what it was he wanted there.

Ben rubbed his hair in some perplexity, as he thought over the conveyances kept by his neighbours. "Lots of 'em have got gigs," said he; "but a open gig mightn't do, perhaps, miss? You'd 'not care to be seen, I take it, going along the road."

"I would rather not be, Ben. We might meet someone who knew me."

"Could you go after dark, miss?"

"No. I want to catch the train that passes Cheston at five o'clock."

"I know of a covered, light spring cart, miss, if I could only get it," resumed Ben. "It belongs to Bowden, the miller; but old Bowden's a regular screw in the way of lending. Anyway, I'll try. I'll get it somehow, if I have to steal it temporary. It'll rattle us to the station, miss, in no time. Young Jim Bowden and me are chums, and Jim won't be backward to help me."

"Then, Ben, I shall depend upon you," she said. "You can bring the cart at four o'clock, to the back of the house by the farm wall, and I will come out quietly to you."

"This afternoon, did you mean?" cried Ben, foreseeing difficulties.

"No, no; to-morrow. This afternoon would not suit me."

"All right, miss. You'll find me and the cart there, safe enough."

Later in the morning, Mrs. Mayne called Mary to her dressing-room to do a bit of work, and there took her to task. Escape she must, she told her, and nobody knew that better than Mary herself; why then this delay? Mary said very little, and when she came away she left her mother in a passion of tears.

In the afternoon, Mary, shut up in her chamber, wrote a hasty letter. She was affixing the postage stamp to it when Mr. Mayne's voice was heard in the passage calling to her.

"What are you about, Mary? Here's Godfrey been asking for you this half-hour. Where are you?"

"I will go to him, dear Mr. Mayne," she answered, running out; "I will go to him now. Let me just put this in the bag first."

She went swiftly downstairs to the hall table, put the letter in the post-bag, and then went up again to Godfrey's room.

But it chanced that Mrs. Mayne, not intentionally, had overheard this. When the coast was clear, she also went softly down to the post-bag and looked at the address of Mary's letter.

"Mrs. Ross,
Great Cumberland Street,
Hyde Park, London."

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Mayne, with a long breath. And she drew together her thin lips, and nodded her head several times in angry perplexity as she stole away, after replacing the note in the bag.

Godfrey, fully dressed for the first time, was sitting in the arm-chair in his bedroom; he looked up eagerly as Mary came in. Garner, her duties partly relaxed, had gone below.

"Why do you stay away from me?" he said, holding out his hand. "You know I only live in your presence."

"I stay away because you will talk nonsense," replied Mary, putting on a gay air. "I allowed you to do it while you were so very ill; but all that is over, and must be forgotten."

Godfrey flushed scarlet. "Don't you care for me, Mary?"

"Not in that way: neither do you, I am sure, for me. Sick persons have fancies, as Mrs. Garner says, and while they are sick it does not do to contradict them. Why, Godfrey, what can you be thinking of?—there's Elspeth, you know, and Ernest."

"I don't believe you care for Ernest."

"Oh, yes I do. Do be reasonable."

He lay back his head on the soft-cushioned rail of the chair, his face a picture of mortification. Mary sat near, cutting the leaves of a new book.

"Yes, of course, there's Elspeth," he said at length, "and—and Ernest; and I've been a fool. But I have a brother's right to protect you, Mary, and I shall exercise it."

"When it is needed," she said, laughing. "Shall I read to you, Godfrey?"

"If you like. I don't mind."

She read to him in her soft low voice. It soothed him to sleep. Mrs. Garner came in and he opened his eyes.

"There," said Mary to him, "I have put the mark in the place until to-morrow. "It is an amusing book."

"I hope to-morrow I shall get downstairs," said Godfrey.

Mary laughed at the remark, and Mrs. Garner remonstrated. "Don't you think about that yet, Master Godfrey. It would just lay you up again, sir; worse perhaps than before."

In the morning, Mary made the slight preparation needful for her departure. She could only venture to take with her a small travelling

bag, one that might be carried in her own hand. In the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Mayne went for a drive in the brougham ; and now Mary's time was approaching.

Putting on the things, including a close bonnet and veil, which she meant to travel in, and hiding the bag under her cloak, Mary stole downstairs. She had reached the hall and was about to turn to make her way out by the refectory, when she saw the lady's maid, Lydia, standing in the passage ; so Mary passed on to the drawing-room. And then she found that she was somewhat early : that drawing-room clock kept perfect time.

She had been keeping up a brave face lately for the world, but her misery nearly over-mastered her now. She let the bag fall, flung herself on the ground, and buried her face in the little low chair on which she had sat so often while Godfrey hung over her and teased her. How could she leave him ! What would he do when he found her gone ? He had risked his life for her, had poured out upon her a love so unmeasured, so fervent, that it had woken hers in spite of herself ; and in obedience to cruel promises, which had been wrench'd from her in a time of loneliness and weakness by a woman whose motherly instincts towards her seemed lately to have failed, she must leave him now, perhaps to die. She dared not go back to him to take one farewell look ; she could no longer trust herself. She got up quickly from her knees in a fever of passionate longing that must find some outlet ; she threw aside her mantle, opened the piano, and with all the burning tenderness and the wild despair at her heart vibrating in her voice, she sang as she had never sung before, as the woman and the artist could never sing again, Tosti's "Good-bye."

The melody, in its stirring mournfulness, rang through the house ; though she never supposed it could be heard in Godfrey's room ; faint echoes reached the servants' hall, and made the cook set wide the door and say with mild approval that she liked that and it made her feel quite all-overish-like. Unfortunately it reached the ears of Godfrey, then all alert, listening for Mary's entrance to continue the book ; and it roused him like a trumpet-call. While the wailing "Good-bye for ever" was on her lips, there was a halting footstep in the passage, the door opened, and Godfrey came limping in. His knee was weak yet.

"No, no ; you shall not go. I see what you were about to do, Mary. You cannot, shall not leave me."

Instinctively his arms closed round her, and he bent his fair, flushed face towards hers—upon her. But Mary put him away from her with a long, wailing cry.

"You don't know what you are saying," said she, piteously. "I must go, I must leave you. You are putting me in a danger more awful than you know of by wishing me to stay. If you do care for me, Godfrey, you will let me go."

"You are in no danger," he cried, passionately. "If you had

broken every law of God and man, I would take you away and find some spot where my hands could work for you, where my eyes could watch over you, and where, in my love, you should forget every trouble. Ernest?—Elspeth?—what are either of them compared with what we are to one another? But I know you have done no wrong, Mary; my sight is clear enough now, and I am certain that you are bearing a burden which is not yours. You are doing this for your mother."

Mary started. "She did not tell you that?"

"No, my love told me. Your life shall not be ruined for her. She is selfish, heartless, wicked to ask it. Wicked——"

"No, no, no; you do not understand. But there's no time to lose. Listen, Godfrey; I am not going with that man, as perhaps you think. I *must* go, there's no help for it; but I'm going alone. I am going to friends who will protect me, and you would do me more harm than you can possibly imagine were you to try to hinder it."

As she ceased speaking, a figure darkened one of the windows, which was open, and the head of Ben Griffiths appeared at the aperture. The young man, daring and bold in general, looked scared to death.

"Mr. Godfrey"—in a husky, alarming whisper—"the police are coming. They are in the avenue, half-a-dozen of them, making for the Abbey. I beg pardon, sir, but I thought I'd better run on and warn somebody."

"The police!" shrieked Mary. "Coming here!"

She caught up her cloak and bag, threw the latter to Ben from the window, and escaped out of the room. Godfrey, perplexed, astounded, and too weak yet to be of much use in any way, was hardly sure that he had heard correctly.

"What did you say, Ben?—that the police were coming here?"

He spoke to empty air. Ben Griffiths had left the window, and Godfrey could see no trace of him. In the same moment he caught sight of the glazed hats of the policemen, and then of the men themselves, advancing upon the Abbey with steady measured tread.

(*To be continued.*)



A FEW WORDS ABOUT BLINDNESS.

IT is always much better to read a description of a country, written by some one who has lived in it, than to read such a description written by one who only knows the country of which he speaks through the careful picking up and arranging of words dropped by travellers, or through the diligent study of books which treat minutely of the land in question.

Many great authors have striven to portray, in their word pictures, blind men and women; many great thinkers have put on paper weighty sayings about blindness in the abstract; but very rare have been the blind people who themselves have said anything in print on the subject. This is why the writer, who has had, since childhood, a long personal experience of blindness, ventures to ask an audience for the following remarks, thinking that they may lighten the hearts of some who are watching, in heavy sadness, the gradual darkening of eyes that they love, and may make the way which they have to tread seem less gloomy to those on whom the deprivation of sight comes late on in life, and may take from kindly souls some of the burden of pity which oppresses them when a blind neighbour passes by.

In most minds there seems to exist a notion that the blind man goes about the world shut up in a sort of terrible iron cage, like the Tartar king of old renown. He is still in the midst of God's blessed light and air; he is still in the midst of the haunts of men, where laughter is laughed, and tears are shed, and loving looks and words are exchanged; and yet from all these things he is irrevocably shut out as long as he remains upon earth.

Now no idea is more mistaken than this. Blind men or women have to the full as much enjoyment, in their own peculiar way, of the glories and beauties of fair external nature, and of the sweetesses of social intercourse, as those who can see. When they feel the warmth of the sun, it calls up before them a picture of exceeding brightness, which, very likely, far outshines the radiance of the actual scene around them. Their sense of smell, which is always especially delicate, fills, for them, the summer breeze, which comes stealing up from the garden, or dancing across the fields and woodland, with a spell of many-woven perfume which language has no words subtle enough to describe. The different tones of loved voices have, for their ears, a range and depth of meaning, which betrays to them, often more quickly than the most careful study of a face will do, what is going on in the heart and mind within.

Nor are the eyes of others sealed books to the blind. This statement may appear, perhaps to some, incredible, but it is simply and literally true. The writer is always most fully aware when any

pair of eyes is fixed upon her, and is aware, too, of the meaning of the look; whether it is wonder, affection, or dislike. The writer is instantly conscious of the fact when any point in her dress or appearance is attracting the gaze of another, and she has many a secret bit of amusement at the manner in which usually very civil, well-bred people will, sometimes, favour her with a prolonged stare, under the impression that blindness makes her quite impervious to such rudeness of behaviour. When any one sitting or standing near is talking to a third person, yet thinking of her, and glancing, from time to time, at her, the circumstance never remains unknown to her; it is as plain to her as it would be to one with the most watchful, discerning eyes.

The writer has often the privilege of speaking of the Word of God to full Bible-classes or in meeting-rooms. Though she cannot see her audience with the bodily eye, she never fails to know whether their attention and their looks are wandering, or whether both are fixed earnestly upon her. What the instinct or the feeling is like which gives thus consciousness of the language of the eye to one who is without sight, it is very difficult to describe; still more difficult is it to give it a name. Medical men, or men of science or metaphysics, can endeavour, if they please, to classify it, and ticket it with some long-sounding title; those who are the servants of the King are content to see in it one more proof of a Heavenly Father's love and mercy. Whenever He takes away anything from His children, He always, in ten-fold ways, gives compensation. It is His will that all His creatures shall be fearfully and wonderfully made, and in their making shall show forth His glory; if He takes away a sense or a faculty, He gives a new one in its place, or bestows double perfection and keenness on one already possessed.

A beautiful country gives as much pleasure to a blind man as to a man who can see. How full Switzerland or Wales, or any other land sought after for picturesque scenery, is of sounds that delight the ear, and wake up the imagination! The rush of the cataract, the airy tinkle of the smaller waterfall, the gurgle, and bubble, and murmur, and ripple of many-toned brooks; the long sweep of melody made by the wind as it hurries down some mountain gorge; the whisper of the little breezes to the listening leaves in wood or forest; the sighing of the storm as it rises to begin its grand chorus among the hills and ravines; the varied song of birds that dwell in bowers of deep green foliage, song that is now a musical trill, and now a drawn-out thread of silver, and now a dropping well of liquid sweetness—all these things have in them a wondrous meaning of beauty for one who receives impressions only through the ear. A meaning and a beauty that cannot be more than faintly conceived by him who, while his eyes are feasting, gives but little heed to the delights that his other senses are, almost imperceptibly, gathering up.

A blind man or woman gains, much more quickly than is often

supposed, a knowledge of a new house or locality, and a correct notion of space, size, &c. The noise made by a closing door or window gives the practised ear, at once, the dimensions of a room, the sound of a footstep tells the length of a passage, the roll of carriage wheels describes the extent of the street. And when the chimes break into little waves of harmony among the lofty arches of some cathedral, or the organ pours a majestic river of swelling tones down the vast shadowy aisles, what a vision of grandeur, built up in glorified stone, rises before the mind, which, by means of the ear alone, takes in the whole fabric.

In the same way the experienced ear gauges characters by the voice, and seldom is wrong in its conceptions. In this respect, indeed, the blind have often the advantage over those who can see, for the voice always betrays emotion more quickly even than the face ; it is more difficult to school our tones into playing a hollow part than our features.

If the blind man is in the middle of unsympathetic scenes, and people, and surroundings, he need never remain there long; just one strong effort with the wings of imagination, and he is far away in an instant. His eyes do not show him the cold, or uncomfortable realities in the midst of which he is, and so his fancy is at liberty to play any bright magic tricks she pleases. When he is walking through a dusty, prosaic town thoroughfare, he may, unknown to the matter-of-fact companion at his side, be treading the dew-drenched paths of some forest solitude ; or when he is sitting in a strange house, he may be in the familiar chair at some well-loved fireside, miles distant. It is a precious, blessed power, this, granted to the blind, the so-called afflicted—a power, which many who have eyes to see will, perhaps, with dreary longing in different stages of their life's journey, envy.

"He is dark," or "She is dark," is not at all an uncommon way among the lower orders for speaking of a blind man or woman ; but, "He is light," or "She is light," would be, in reality, a much truer form of expression. We are not talking now of the radiance that illuminates the mind ; we mean the eye, and the eye alone. There is one sort of blindness which consists in a cloud of dazzling brightness, such as must have surrounded the Mercy Seat of the Most High of old, into which the eyes are incessantly gazing. Let the night be ever so black, the sky ever so gloomy, this flood of excessive brilliancy still encircles him whom men call unhappy. And when any colour is named, and the blind seer of this wondrous light wishes to behold the mentioned hue, he has but to think intently on it, and the harmless fire, which is his constant companion, becomes a beautiful red, or blue, or green blaze. No doubt oculists can account fully for this apparently singular phenomenon, but not the less is it a further sign of God's love for His blind children.

The very mistakes and small confusions which blindness sometimes brings about in daily life, are, to blind men or women, if

they have a spark of humour in them, sources of perennial amusement. What can be more comic than the situation, when, misled by the singular similarity of voices which we so often find in families? You think that the prim old-maiden lady, who has just shaken hands with you, is her younger sister, the happy mother of thirteen, and ask, with affectionate interest, whether she left the dear twins at home feeling better after the measles? Who can resist a hearty laugh; the sort of laugh that makes the spirit of ennui spread his wings and take flight; when, on wandering along an inn passage, trying to find your way back to your own room, which sometimes at first, without your eyes, when you have not quite learnt the bearings of the place, is a rather puzzling task, you suddenly come in contact with a fussy, nervous old gentleman, who sees that you are not moving about exactly like other folk, and cannot quite make up his mind whether he shall run away or offer you his arm.

The writer has had many experiences of this ludicrous kind. Once she was sitting by an old lady in church who could not, by some unlucky mischance, find out the right lessons; either the church was unusually dark, or she had forgotten to put her spectacles in her pocket. Now it struck this dear old lady that her neighbour in the pew, as she had a young face, must certainly have young eyes too. So it came to pass that the writer suddenly felt a book poked into her hand, and heard a somewhat imperative whisper bidding her find out the right places at once, as the service was just going to begin. The writer meekly declared her inability to do the old lady's behest in as loud a tone as time and place would allow; but what with the pealing notes of the organ which just then were beginning to fill the building, and what with the dame being apparently a little hard of hearing, she could not make her meaning understood. The old lady would not and could not realise the true state of the matter. She thrust her prayer-book closer, as if it were a bayonet, and there was a terrible exasperation in her whispered tones, which seemed to indicate that the old lady's husband, if she had one, must have, occasionally, no very good time of it. The writer continued her explanations in much fear and trembling, but the resolute old lady could not be turned from her purpose. What might have been the end of the affair is a question we shrink from uneasily, if a kind-hearted verger, noticing on his rounds that something was amiss, had not come to the rescue and satisfied the old lady, who thereupon arranged her silks and laces with a sniff of triumph, and evidently considered that she had had her own way in spite of everything.

Such is the laughable side of blindness. Now let us look at the subject more earnestly, and with a view to the use which blind men and women may make of their lives. We will begin by saying that they have not the smallest right, more than any other member of the community, to sit down and say that they can make their lives of no possible use at all; they must never forget the beau-

tiful old Italian proverb, "If God closes for us a door, He only does it that we may make, for ourselves, a wide gate by which to go out and serve Him."

In the large, and well-taught, and admirably appointed institutions for the blind, which flourish, under excellent management, throughout the length and breadth of the land, different kinds of handicrafts are carefully taught the boys and girls, until their fingers become as useful as other people's, which are guided by the eye as well as the touch. We have no space now to enter into and dwell upon these ; we would only recommend, in the education of blind children, great pains being taken in developing and strengthening the faculty of memory, which is a power that, in the course of their lives, will be essentially useful to them in unnumbered ways. We would also wish that in schools for the blind, a little more cultivation was, in general, given to the fancy, and a little more encouragement to its flights. Teachers and directors seem to be backward and timid on this point, they appear to have a notion that such things will be dangerous for these children, one of whose senses is walled up ; but we can assure them, from personal experience, that a lively imagination is one of the most precious possessions that can belong to the blind. Poetry and fiction of the highest class should be freely and largely read aloud to the blind children, and they need not fear for the result.

What are the intellectual fields of work open to the blind ? They are more numerous than any casual thinker might suppose. A musical blind man or woman, whose talent has been properly educated and strengthened, can bring in no inconsiderable income to themselves and their families as organists, or as teachers of music. Most of the schools and institutions for the blind recognise very fully and rightly this fact, and cultivate to the utmost their pupils' musical powers. But there is one branch of learning that might bring the blind lucrative employment in after life, which does not seem to be so general in blind schools ; we mean the study of languages, and especially of modern tongues. The quick ear of blind boys and girls would gain, by means of conversation with a foreigner, correctness of pronunciation, and ease of expression in any language with marvellous rapidity and facility. And what an advantage it would be to them, as men and women, to be able to instruct pupils in the fluent use of some foreign tongue. No exercises in the world that ever were penned can teach a language like the scholar being compelled to converse in it, and our blind French and German and Italian masters and mistresses would be, if beforehand well trained, the best and most ready conversers for a pupil to be placed under.

By means of the Brail system, which makes reading with the fingers a perfectly easy task, a blind man or woman has it put fully within their power to become a Scripture reader or Bible-woman. This is work for the blind which may produce comfortable small salaries ; moreover, it is glorious work for God and man in which they

may have a share. Those blind gentlemen and ladies who are possessed of independent means may, in this way, use most nobly their energies.

Literature, the lecture-room, the pulpit, and Parliament are all arenas of noble effort which are just as much open to the blind as to those who can see. No wonder, then, that we say our blind children should have the richest stores of education lavished upon them. Of course, their lessons will need special earnestness and patience, particularly at the beginning, on the part of the teachers; but those engaged in the work will find it one of rare interest as they go on. Of course, too, those blind people who would enter upon any of the careers in life we have just named, must make up their minds to use and display an extra amount of energy and perseverance; but when they succeed, their merit is all the greater.

The beautiful and wonderful American machine called the type-writer, which year by year is being brought to greater perfection, is likely to open a new gate in the world's vast workshop for the blind to enter in at. The simple expedient of the letters and numbers being carved upon the keys, instead of printed, as is ordinarily the case, makes the machine easily learnt by any blind person with even moderate application. With the outlay of about twenty guineas to buy a type-writer, a blind man can become a clerk who writes more distinctly and swiftly than the readiest scribe that ever put pen to paper. Copying letters, &c., might, perhaps, seem at first to form an obstacle to this employment in offices for the blind; but how easily a blind clerk could, for a very small remuneration, furnish himself with a boy who would act in such cases as his eyes. Other and cheaper type-writers are also gradually springing up, and presently they will be no doubt within the reach of the most moderate resources.

Finally, let all blind men and women, and all connected with them, remember, that He whose will it is that they should walk through the world deprived of a sense, is a loving, omniscient Father, who knows, in some way that they cannot perhaps as yet see, that this will be well and good for them; therefore in every moment of their lives let them keep in mind the words, "Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents, but that the glory of God may be shown forth in him." Let this be their high and holy object in all they strive to do or to speak, and both here and in the heavenly country they shall not be behind those who can see.

ALICE KING.

ON AND OFF:
A STORY OF TWO WORLDLY PEOPLE.
BY VERA SINGLETON, AUTHOR OF "MY SATURDAYS."

CHAPTER IV.

FREDDY WHIPPLE'S appearance took Lord Clitheroe somewhat by surprise ; but yachting men are too much accustomed to dropping from the skies themselves to be astonished at finding anyone turning up anywhere. There was just enough bustle, however, about the landing and meeting to allow Wilfrid Chesney to slip off un-introduced, and pursue his way to the post-office alone. He was not fond of appearing in the character of what Freddy had called "tame doctor," and sometimes now took solitary fits, which Lord Clitheroe called "grumps," and Lady Clitheroe "melancholy."

A new arrival and an old friend was too great a windfall into the dullness of garrison life in Guernsey to be lightly let slip ; Freddy kept hold of his prize, and inquired his intentions. When it appeared that he was in search of rooms, where his wife would be comfortable on shore for a week or so, and had not the least idea how to set about looking for them—Freddy insisted that he and "the doctor" should come up to lunch at Mr. Plympton's, and consult Ada, whose name, however, he did not happen to mention. After some demur from fear of intruding, Lord Clitheroe finally accepted the invitation, and went off to seek Wilfrid ; while, by dint of much muscular exertion, guided by local knowledge, Freddy contrived to dash through the market, buy a basket of the peculiar Guernsey make, and fill it with great golden plums, and red-brown figs bursting with warm oozy sweetness ; and moreover to scale the face of the hill by endless flights of steps, and give Ada timely notice of the approach of guests. She had been making up her mind to the chance of a meeting, but this was sooner than she had bargained for.

"What is the doctor's name ?" she asked.

"Don't know. I didn't ask, and I don't think Clitheroe mentioned it. I didn't see him to be introduced."

Had Freddy mentioned hers, she wondered, but dared not ask. "If he knows that I am here, he won't come," she decided. But since the days of her short courtship she had not dressed herself so carefully as she did for luncheon that day, though she had not much time for thinking of it.

Lord Clitheroe and Dr. Chesney were rather late in arriving at the pretty little furnished house which Mr. Plympton had taken, overlooking the harbour. They were shown into a prim, pleasant

room, with French windows opening on a little plot of grass garden. Wilfrid caught sight at once of an old gentleman in an arm-chair, and of a fair, graceful little lady in black standing behind him. He stood stock-still, uncertain whether to bolt or face it out, and feeling suddenly as if he had committed some tremendous crime, and were going to be publicly exposed. Before he had thought of any measures of self-defence, Freddy had introduced Lord Clitheroe to the gentleman and lady, and Lord Clitheroe was saying :

"This is curious. I was just about to introduce my friend as Dr. Chesney, but perhaps it is unnecessary."

"Yes," said Ada, advancing calmly, and holding out her hand. "Dr. Chesney and I have met before."

Wilfrid shook hands with her in stupid silence. He literally could not find a word to say. What a fashion in which to meet his wife ! He did not know whether he ought to recognise her or not.

"It is pleasant for you to meet a friend, my dear," remarked Mr. Plympton. "I suppose Dr. Chesney is a relation."

"We are connexions by marriage," Ada replied, with an audacious glance at Wilfrid's confused face. "Dr. Chesney belongs to my husband's family."

He recovered his self-possession in a sudden sense of the absurdity of the position.

"It is a long time since I had the pleasure of seeing you. I hope you have been well ever since, and enjoyed yourself."

"We will compare notes at our leisure by-and-bye," she answered, airily. "I want to hear your adventures too, but in the meantime luncheon waits."

The luncheon did credit to the extempore resources of both house-keeper and cook ; and Freddy took great pride in the sumptuous dish of fruit which he had piled up himself, and decorated with vine-leaves. Lord Clitheroe enjoyed himself ; he liked his kindly host ; he promptly got up a mild flirtation with Mrs. Chesney ; he made acquaintance with Guernsey sour curds, rich and flaky, and under her tuition treated them in proper style with cream, sugar, and nutmeg ; while Wilfrid sat at the side, a very secondary personage indeed, with Freddy to do the civil to him,—and watched his wife presiding at another man's table, bestowing all her smiles and her lively remarks upon another guest, and seemingly only remembering his existence to perform the courteous duties of a hostess. If she had absolutely ignored him, he thought it would have been less infuriating ; but when she told Freddy to give Dr. Chesney a clean plate, he longed to hurl it at her head, and when she asked him carelessly if he would not try the curds too, he would as soon have swallowed poison. He would be even with her, though. She was mistress of the situation now ; and after all, he did not want to change it. She treated him as a stranger, and so would he treat her ; he would ignore her airs and graces, and her flirtations, and her confounded

coolness, and be as cool as herself. After all, what was there between them, but a few weeks' folly two years ago, which they had agreed to forget?

Luncheon over, the question of lodgings was fully discussed, Ada contributing all the information she possessed, and Wilfrid going into Lady Clitheroe's special requirements in the most matter-of-fact fashion. Just as a list of possible rooms was being drawn up, a strong tug at the door-bell made Mr. Plympton start, and preluded the appearance of a fat middle-aged man, creasy as to the eyes, smooth as to the cheeks, and either oily or careless as to manner, who pressed the middle of Ada's hand with the tips of his fingers, and made a low rather un-English bow, when introduced by Freddy to Lord Clitheroe as Major Bangham.

"I am happy to meet your lordship. Do you make a long stay in the island?"

"That will depend upon Lady Clitheroe's health, and upon the advice of our friend, Dr. Chesney," the Viscount answered, introducing the latter by a gesture.

"Chesney? Ah!" remarked Major Bangham, looking interrogatively at Ada.

"A connection by marriage of Mrs. Chesney," explained Mr. Plympton, carefully rehearsing his information.

"Ah!" repeated the major. "Relative of the late Mr. Chesney, I presume?"

"His son," put in Ada, demurely.

Wilfrid's eyes met hers with a glance of intense amusement. Angry as he was, he could not help entering into the fun.

"Oh, indeed! Indeed," rather puzzled. "Oh, yes, to be sure," brightening up as a solution occurred to him. "Mrs. Chesney's step-son, of course. I never could guess those puzzles about relationship. If John married James's sister, and James married John's mother, you know: that sort of thing."

"The only puzzle that has to be solved at present," Ada interrupted, "is where to find rooms with a sea view, a cool bedroom, a nice garden to sit out in, and not approached by streets with a pavement calculated to dislocate the springs of a bath-chair, and the nerves of an invalid. Do you know of such an elysium, Major Bangham?"

"Upon my word, I think those rooms the Robinsons have just turned out of—you know them, Whipple—are as like it as anything you'll find."

"To be sure," said Freddy, "Abominably stupid of me not to have thought of it before. Nice little diggings they are, I know; but how to find them is past me. I know you go up a road, and down a lane, and into another road, and down another lane, and then find yourself somewhere between Fermain and Pleinmont, close to the cliffs."

"Not very clear," responded his superior officer. "I will write down the address, and then if Lord Clitheroe takes a trap, the driver will probably be able to find the place."

"I am much obliged to you, I am sure," responded Lord Clitheroe. "If you have nothing better to do this afternoon, perhaps you would have the kindness to join us. I suppose I can get a carriage that will hold the party, and it is a lovely afternoon for a drive."

"Guernsey carriages can be had of all dimensions," put in Freddy. "A chair accommodates two affectionate people and a pug dog; the larger vehicles are designed to convey a Rechabite picnic party each, together with the tea-kettles."

"Thanks," responded the major; "but really it is rather hot to be out, you know; and this drawing-room has charms which it is difficult for a man to resist," with a languishing look at Ada.

"I hoped to rob it of most of its charms by persuading Mr. Plympton and Mrs. Chesney to accompany us," Lord Clitheroe answered, turning to them. "It would be so kind of you to act as guides and counsellors, and make quite a pleasure party of that most wearisome business, hunting for lodgings."

Mr. Plympton, of course, took a good deal of persuading, but he yielded as soon as he realised that his presence was the condition of Ada's. Freddy rushed off, vowing that he would be back in less than half-an-hour in possession of the largest carriage St. Peterport could produce; and Ada stepped outside the window to gather a spray of jessamine.

"Is there not a charming view from this little lawn, Dr. Chesney?" she asked. Her manner gave an invitation to join her, which he was too sulky to accept at once.

"Charming," he answered, lazily; "and this chair is judiciously placed so as to command it without the trouble of going there."

The pink in her cheeks grew deep; she turned away to choose a rose. Lord Clitheroe stepped out instantly.

"It is lovely," he said with emphasis. "Might one light a cigar and take a stroll round?"

"By all means. Mr. Plympton does not dislike tobacco in the open air."

"But do you dislike it?"

"Oh, not in the least; I can even stand it in-doors. Not that I am ever called on to do so now, but when I lived in the world I found it necessary. A sort of conventional atmosphere enwraps the woman before whom men dare not smoke."

"I am happy to say that Mrs. Chesney is always indulgent to our little foibles," inserted the bland voice of Major Bangham, who had likewise emerged from the drawing-room, and was producing a fat cigar from a fatter cigar case, elaborately embroidered.

"Not to all," said Ada, with a pretty little shake of her head; "it wouldn't be good for you."

"What are on your Index Purgatorius, then?" asked the Major. Lord Clitheroe gave a little gasp.

"Brandy before dinner-time, I think,—and bad tobacco, I am sure. Oh, and flattery. Not compliments, you know, but flattery."

"Pray, what is the difference?" inquired Lord Clitheroe.

"Compliments are praise that one can appropriate; flattery is praise that one can't. If you praise me only a little beyond my real deserts, I absorb it, and think you very discriminating; but if you say of me more than my self-conceit can swallow, I find you out as a humbug, and think you must be very blind to my real merits to be obliged to invent imaginary ones."

"One would have to be so, indeed," smiled the Major.

"So in fact," said Lord Clitheroe, "compliment is the radius that measures the sphere of self-conceit."

"Or the plumb-line that sounds its depths," laughed Ada. "But now I must go and dress, or the impatient horses will be pawing the ground before the portal."

The vehicle did not quite come up to Freddy's description, but it was a capacious one. Mr. Plympton and Mrs. Chesney were soon settled in the back seat, with Lord Clitheroe and Major Bangham opposite to them; Wilfrid mounted the box, and Freddy declared that the rumble suited him best, because he could keep an eye on the whole party, and feel himself in command.

The lodgings were found, surveyed, and taken; the landlady was induced to prepare tea; and while she was making her arrangements, the party went out on the cliffs. Ada settled Mr. Plympton on cushions in the shade, and sat down by him; Freddy and Lord Clitheroe stretched themselves on the grass beside them; while, to Wilfrid's great surprise, he was taken possession of by Major Bangham, who insisted on his walking out to the end of the "point" to look at the view. This sudden development of energy in one who looked the incarnation of laziness was rather startling, and Wilfrid was not much disposed to respond to the air of *chumminess* which his new acquaintance at once assumed. For some distance Major Bangham seemed to devote his attention to making himself agreeable; but when they came to the end of the grassy promontory, and, leaning over a bit of rough granite wall, looked down at the brown cliffs and blue sea below, he left off talking, and they smoked in silence.

"He's trotted me out here to say something," meditated Wilfrid, "and now he's bound to say it. Wonder if he's going to ask my leave to propose to my wife. I should think I was the right one to give her away. Well, he's welcome to her for me." Presently the Major began.

"Pretty little woman, your fair relative."

Wilfrid nodded.

"Lots of life about her, and no end of go. I hate your dead-and-alive beauties, who always want one to be mooning round. I like a woman that makes some stir round her."

"I should not have thought that Mrs. Chesney's position admitted of her making a stir," answered Wilfrid, coldly.

"That's so ; and an abominable shame it is that a woman like her should be in such a position. She might be a duchess from her style ; she'd become any position. Even as it is, when she comes into a room, one feels quite different, you know ; one isn't bored any more. She's like the brandy in the soda." Wilfrid ground his teeth, and muttered something that was not heard, and need not be written.

"I don't deny," Major Bangham went on reflectively, "that I'm rather gone on her. You can see that for yourself, and I'm not ashamed of it. But," continued the Major, growing still more confidential, "it wasn't exactly for that I wanted to speak to you. I wanted some information. You see, I've an awkwardness about asking herself, and one likes to be on the safe side."

"No doubt the lady's employer was well informed of her antecedents when he engaged her. I should think he was the best person for you to make your inquiries of."

"Never thought I should get any sense out of him, poor old fellow. She turns him round her finger, of course. But here are you, you see, one of the family ; and if there's anything shady, I'll just let the matter alone. I've not compromised myself—I always take care of that ; and you needn't say anything. If you don't want to answer any questions, we'll say no more about it."

Wilfrid was dismayed at the effect of his silence, and hurried to repair it.

"Not at all, not at all. You've taken me up quite wrongly. I know nothing to her disadvantage, nothing at all, quite the reverse. I only meant that as I had not seen anything of her for some years, I could tell you very little about her affairs, and was not much inclined to interfere in them. You must understand that there isn't the shadow of an imputation upon her in any way."

"Well, that's all right. But the thing I really wanted to ask you is very simple. It's only when your respected father died, and where he was buried. I always like to have these matters quite clear," observed the Major, as if he made a matrimonial contract once a year.

"My father?" Wilfrid stared. He had totally forgotten that he was supposed to be his own son. "He died about six years ago, at Bournemouth. Though really, why ——"

"That's very satisfactory—very satisfactory indeed. I'm delighted to hear it, and much obliged to you for the information."

"Upon my word, sir, you are somewhat less than polite. I don't know what reason you can have to rejoice over my father's death ; and at any rate, I won't have you do it in my presence."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon. It was confoundedly bad form, but for the moment I only looked at it from my point of view. You must make allowances."

"I don't know what your point of view is," returned Wilfrid, glumly, "and I don't want to. But of course, if you apologise, that's all about it."

"I do, indeed ; it was merely a *lapsus*. Suppose we join the party now ; that tea ought to be brewed by this time."

They turned back, and soon met the indefatigable Freddy, coming to hunt them up. Tea was ready in the little parlour. Wilfrid was hesitating between sulks and a cigar outside, and tea and sociability inside, but Ada pressed down the more genial scale. She turned back as the party were filing in at the narrow door-way, and simply said :

"Won't you come too ?"

There was appeal in her voice, and forgiveness in her eyes. Wilfrid felt that he needed the latter more than she knew, and he yielded. He sat near her at tea ; she was quietly graceful in her manner, and did not flirt with Major Bangham ; she drew him into talk about the scenery and the climate, and soothed his hurt pride with gentle attention ; and best of all, she did not once call him Dr. Chesney. He melted and expanded under this sunshine, and became a lively member of a lively party, instead of a wet blanket. Major Bangham felt left out, and looked cross. He was mentally concluding that he had been a fool to say anything to that conceited pill-box, who was evidently trying to cut him out. It was infamous on his part to interfere with a man of his position who had serious intentions ; for even if a woman affected by Major Bangham were silly enough to think twice of a travelling apothecary, he couldn't marry his step-mother. However, the young saw-bones (Major Bangham found in his somewhat narrow vocabulary an unexpected wealth of contemptuous terms for his rival) was here to-day, and would be gone to-morrow ; while he remained, with his position, and his private fortune, and his irresistible address, and his pleasing personal appearance. He had no doubt whatever of the result, and concluded that he need not disturb himself.

The pleasant meal came to an end, and thoughts of Lady Clitheroe and dinner forbade any further loitering on the cliffs. The party returned as it had set out, and Wilfrid, re-consigned to his solitary elevation, had time to think matters over.

"Let me see," he meditated, "I understand the position now, and what that fat fool meant by crowing over the poor old governor's death. I'm my own father—no, I was my own father, and now I'm my own son ; and my wife is my step-mother, and also my widow. It's as pretty a mess as ever I saw, but it's none of my making. Ada got us into it, and she may get us out. Not that it matters to me. I suppose the fellow will go now and propose to her, right off the reel. I wonder how often he has squeezed her hand ; hang his impudence ! But why shouldn't he if she lets him ? I should have thought Ada would have taken better care of herself. Of course she likes it ; she's an arrant flirt ; all women are when they get the chance. I suppose she was flirting at me to-night ; but how she does it, the little baggage !

She never was so charming when I was married to her. Tell you what, Wilfrid Chesney, the worst danger in all this business is—that you should go and fall in love with your own wife. That would just do for you, when you've got comfortably settled, and she too. You just keep out of the way, and let her manage her own affairs. What does it matter if Bangham does make love to her? She won't commit bigamy. It's only a piece of fun for her, and why shouldn't he come a cropper? It won't hurt him; he's too fat, and too conceited; he'll fall soft. And may I be there to see!"

CHAPTER V.

WILFRID found it considerably easier to make these sensible resolutions than to keep them. When Lady Clitheroe was comfortably installed in her new quarters, at Lord Clitheroe's request Ada called upon her, and they took to each other. As she was the only lady whom the invalid knew in Guernsey, her help was called for upon a hundred trifling occasions, and it seemed necessary for her to be often at Plaisance Cottage. Mr. Plympton liked it; he enjoyed the little stir, and the object for drives; and he liked the Clitheroes well, and Wilfrid better. The cliffs suited him too, and he would spend hours contentedly upon rugs and cushions, in some nook among the gray dry rocks flecked with rosettes of yellow lichen, dreaming, dozing, or reading, in the warm scented air which breathed over the short grass and the aromatic cliff-plants. It very often happened that Wilfrid would be his companion, while Ada sat with Lady Clitheroe; and the two men, although as different as any two could possibly be, had a liking for each other's society. Mr. Plympton was not at the time under any regular medical treatment, and he gladly consented to try some suggestions of his new friend. The result was satisfactory, and in consequence Wilfrid took him regularly in hand. From which it followed, that besides Ada's coming to see his charge, he went to see hers, and all idea of keeping out of the way had to be given up.

How did it fare then with the other and more important resolution—not to fall in love with her? Well, Wilfrid flattered himself that he was keeping it bravely. He met her constantly, that was inevitable,—and after all, he thought it was the best plan. He did not sulk at her, and she did not flirt at him: they met as friends, among friends. When he went out for a long day's fishing with Freddy or some of his set, and caught himself wondering again and again if Ada were at Plaisance Cottage while he was away,—it was only because he was anxious that Lady Clitheroe should have some experienced friend with her, in case that she had one of her "attacks." If the days were long when he did not see her, it was only because Guernsey was a dull little hole, and he felt bored there, as anyone else would. His pulse did not quicken when she appeared; he never felt the least inclination to kiss her, or treasure up a scrap of her handwriting.

These were the sort of things fellows did who were in love ; he didn't want to do them, so it was clear that he was not in love, nor going to be.

He very seldom saw her in company with Major Bangham, who did not love him, and avoided him when possible,—or perhaps his composure might not have been so complete. For every idle afternoon that the Major did not devote to improving Lord Clitheroe's acquaintance brought him to the door of Mr. Plympton's house, generally with offerings of flowers ; and the motive of his siege became sufficiently obvious to frighten Ada. She had played with her pseudo-widowhood, and used it half as a joke, half as a shield, not knowing herself what she meant, and drawn on partly by fun and partly by the force of circumstances. But that she, a married woman, a wife (as she now was keenly conscious, in spite of her strange position), should be seriously made love to, was an insult to which she had never dreamed of exposing herself. And that it should be done almost under her husband's eyes was simply odious. "What must he think of me ?" she asked herself bitterly again and again. The easy and friendly terms on which they now were sometimes solaced and sometimes stung her. They seemed to prove that he trusted her in spite of all ; and then again, might they not mean that he had expected nothing better of her, and cared not how she bore herself? At any rate, the only thing to be done was to repel Major Bangham's advances with all possible decision, and try to hurt his pride.

But unluckily it was not possible for Major Bangham to receive for a moment the idea that Mrs. Chesney meant to refuse him. When he found that she was seldom to be seen, and that when he did see her, she was cool and reticent instead of being lively and fascinating,—he only concluded that his attentions had become too marked for her to receive without compromising herself, until she was sure of his meaning.

"Very right, too," he soliloquised. "Poor little thing, in her position she can't be too careful. I like her all the better for it, but I'll put her out of her pain as soon as possible. Besides, this sort of thing is a horrid nuisance. I can't go on sitting upon a chair with my stick between my legs, talking to that old fool. The very first chance I get, I'll just put my arm round her pretty little waist, and ask her to be Mrs. B."

Opportunities, however, are slow of coming when some one is always on the watch to stave them off, and Major Bangham found it necessary to make one. He paid yet another visit, in which he succeeded in finding Mr. Plympton at home, and Ada could not abandon him. So he leaned back in a chair for half-an-hour, and gazed at Ada, and from time to time smiled quietly at her, as she sat stitching and making conversation, until she was driven to desperation. When at last he uncrossed his legs, and lifted himself from his chair, she felt too angry to shake hands, and was going to let him

depart with a bow. But he came close to her, sidled in between her and Mr. Plympton, and held out three fingers persistently. She was obliged to let him touch her hand, and then felt that he was holding it tight, and mumbling it with his fingers, and trying to work something into it,—like a nervous man with a doctor's fee, only that the doctor generally co-operates to make things easy. Ada would not co-operate, and the something dropped between them on the carpet. It was a little metal tube of some sort.

"You have dropped something, Major Bangham," she remarked, innocently.

"Oh, ah, yes," he said in a flurry, stooping to look for it. It was close to Ada's foot, and she made a slight movement, which swept the flounce of her dress over it.

"I don't see it," he said. "It must have fallen here. I wouldn't have it lost on any account." Ada moved politely out of his way, carrying the article with her.

"Ring for Jane, my dear," suggested Mr. Plympton. "It may have gone under the fender. Was it a pencil-case?"

"Ah; no, please don't ring," said the Major, getting down on his knees with difficulty, and peering under the fender. "It—it wasn't exactly a pencil-case; it was a new kind of pen. I brought it for Mrs. Chesney to try; ladies are such letter-writers."

"Was it anything like this?" asked Ada, with eyes full of mischief, holding up two ordinary barrel-pens, with the nib of one inserted under that of another, so as to make a tube.

Major Bangham looked up on all-fours, very red in the face indeed. When he recognised his property, he scrambled to his feet.

"Yes, yes; that's it. It doesn't matter. Just try them, and if they suit you, you know, I can get you some more. Very much obliged, I'm sure. Sorry to have disturbed you, sir."

He extricated himself from the room somehow, in a state of incoherency which was so uncommon with him as to excite Mr. Plympton's curiosity.

"Our friend seemed strangely excited about his pens," he observed. "What is there remarkable about them, my dear?"

"Nothing at all, I think," answered Ada, who had meantime pulled them apart, and found inside a piece of thin paper tightly rolled up, which she promptly dropped into her work-box. "Externally, they seem the usual pen of the period. Perhaps Major Bangham has discovered that he can spell with them; and so considers that they must be a boon and a blessing to men."

When Ada had an opportunity of untwisting and deciphering the missive thus curiously delivered, she found the following:—

"DEAREST MRS. CHESNEY,—Why this coldness? I can never now win a glance of affection, or a word of encouragement. Alas, how changed! Do you mistrust my intentions? They are all that

you can desire. Ah, be no longer coy ! I shall be at church on Sunday morning, and will wait for you. Then let me have the word or the sign that I long for, to tell me that you will be wholly mine.

"Ever thy adoring

"B."

That day was Friday, and Ada promptly determined to abandon her usual place of worship on the following Sunday ; but matters were otherwise decided for her. Early on Sunday morning, a messenger brought her a note which made her heart leap, and the colour rush to her face. It was from her husband : the first she had had from him since they had been married, and was a curious contrast to her last-received letter.

"Plaisance Cottage, Sunday, 7 A.M.

"DEAR ADA,—Lady Clitheroe is ill. She has one of her usual attacks, not especially bad, but needing constant attendance. Her maid was unwell herself, and this morning she has knocked up. The woman of the house is perfectly useless. Can you come out for the day ?

"Yours affectionately,

"WILFRID CHESNEY."

Mr. Plympton was unusually well, so that she could leave him with a clear conscience in the charge of his man-servant, who was very nearly as good a nurse as herself. When he heard of the emergency, he of course insisted on her going to the rescue as soon as she had breakfasted ; so before long, she was driving through the lanes in one of those tiny carriages described by Freddy, and now and then alleviating her sympathetic regret at the cause of her expedition with enjoyment of Major Bangham's discomfiture. "It ought to settle that matter," she thought.

Wilfrid met her at the door of Plaisance Cottage. "I thought you would come," he said, and shook hands warmly.

"How is she ?"

"Not in danger, but suffering a good deal. I think the worst is over, and I want to get Lord Clitheroe to bed. I daresay he will go now you have come. The maid will have to be looked after a little too."

Lord Clitheroe appeared at the head of the little stairs, looking haggard after his sleepless night. He welcomed Ada, and yielded easily to Wilfrid's recommendations to go to bed ; for indeed the poor man could scarcely keep his eyes open. Wilfrid himself looked only a little tired, and Ada was far too much afraid of undivided responsibility to suggest his retiring. As soon, however, as she felt tolerably at home in Lady Clitheroe's sick-room, she asked him if he had had any breakfast.

"I had a glass of milk and some bread some time ago. I have scarcely been able to leave the room."

"You could go now, couldn't you ? I could call if there is the least occasion. It would not do for you to knock up."

"Well, no ; and I ought to set a good example. I always insist on people who are nursing taking their regular meals. I will see about it. But it is kind of you to think of me," he added, with a sudden change of tone.

Ada blushed deeply and vividly. "Kind of her"—his wife—to have the simplest thought for his needs ! When her duty was to be caring for him every day as now she was caring for a stranger, while all *his* thought and help and tenderness were bought and paid for by Lady Clitheroe ! The unshed tears stung her eyes, but she forced them back, and gave her whole mind to her duties.

They were not light. There was much to be done for the mistress, and something for the maid ; and both forms of illness were of a sort of which Ada had no experience, so that she was anxious, and uncertain of herself. Nothing of this would have been guessed from her quiet watchfulness and ready ministry; common sense and sympathy were enough to enable her to act under Wilfrid, and twenty times that day he blessed his stars (to use his own form of thanksgiving) that she had been within reach. They were drawn closer together than ever they had been before, as they worked in harmony for relieving the two sick women,—he directing, she helping and seconding him,—until towards afternoon the servant's indisposition (which had never been serious) needed no more treatment, and Lady Clitheroe, relieved from pain, had fallen into a sound sleep.

Ada signed to Wilfrid, and they stepped outside the bed-room. She looked at him, inquiringly.

"She is all right now," he said. "Probably she will sleep for some hours, and when she wakes there will not be much to do for her."

"Then," said Ada, timidly, "won't you go to bed now ? I will stay until Lord Clitheroe comes back ; and you were up all night."

"Thinking about me again ? It is good of you ; but you needn't. I'm tough. But what a good nurse you are, Ada ! I had no idea that would have been your line."

He did not know that this was the first time he had called her by her name since they had met again, but she did. She found it hard to answer calmly :

"I have had a good deal of practice with Mr. Plympton, of course."

"I thought you didn't like sick men. I remember you once said that they were hateful, or something of the sort. I thought then it was a bad prospect for me if I were sick, but after all you are a born nurse."

"It was a hasty speech," said Ada ; "but I hope I am not quite so hard-hearted now."

"You are not hard-hearted at all, and I don't believe you ever were. If I were sick now—but what nonsense I'm talking—that comes of sitting up all night. I'm never sick. I feel muddled now,

though ; I don't quite know what I'm saying ; you must excuse me. I think if you will sit with Lady Clitheroe for the present, I will take advantage of your kindness, and go to bed for a few hours. Lord Clitheroe will be sure to turn up soon. I'll order some tea for you now. Good-bye ; and thank you very much for your kind help ; I am sure we are greatly indebted to you."

He shook hands hastily, and was gone before she could say a word. "That was an awfully close shave," he thought, as he plunged under the blanket. "Wilfrid, my boy, you've had the narrowest escape of making a fool of yourself that ever you had since you were born. But how could I tell that she was going to turn out such a—such a—brick ?" Slumber suddenly dropped on him like a featherbed, and smothered his reflections.

Ada sat in the quiet room that summer Sunday evening, while the softened sunshine lay all around, and the scent of the great cabbage-roses in the little garden came up to her. She was tired and happy ; all was well with her patient ; and somehow, some time, might not all be well with her? For now she could see that her husband's heart was turning to her, and she did not care that he still tried to hold her at arm's length, and treat her as a stranger. "He won't keep *that* up long," she thought, triumphantly ; though she did not know what would happen when he failed, and, just now, she did not care.

CHAPTER VI.

MAJOR BANGHAM had had an exceedingly uncomfortable time of it in church. Under the most favourable circumstances it was not an institution which suited his tastes ; but this Sunday he had had no room for his legs, he had sat next to a High Church lady, who looked daggers at him when he stared about and fidgeted,—and last, and worst, he had seen nothing of Ada. He was returning to his quarters in the blackest of sulks, when he met Freddy Whipple.

"Morning, major. You look virtuous, not to say glum. Been to church?"

"Well, yes," grunted the major. "Long time before you catch me there again, though."

"Ah, I thought so. Seemed to me your virtuousness had left you slightly vicious. Now, I'm going to be just as good, and I shan't look vicious after it."

"What are you after, then?"

"Going to keep my old uncle company this afternoon. Mrs. Chesney sent me word that she'd suddenly been sent for this morning to Plaisance Cottage ; Lady Clitheroe taken ill. So I'm just going to look after the old buffer a bit while she's away."

"Ah, very right—very right. I hope Lady Clitheroe's illness is not serious."

"Hope not ; but I don't know anything more about it."

"I must call and inquire to-morrow. Good afternoon."

Major Bangham went home to his luncheon in much improved spirits. Ada's absence from church was now explained, and, of course, she could not send him a note openly, even if she had had time. The cause of it pleased him too: the future Mrs. Bangham was quite at liberty to be as intimate with Lady Clitheroe as she pleased, or as she could. To-morrow, he would call at Mr. Plympton's, and enquire if she had returned, and what news there was from Plaisance Cottage; and if she were still there, he would make his enquiries in person. The difficulties in his way roused his obstinacy, and a battalion of duennas could not now have prevented him from proposing in the form that he thought most suitable for a romantic attachment, in which there were no considerations of property. "I shall give my hand," he said to himself, "where I have given my heart. There is enough in it, and I demand no more. All shall be my Ada's, and I desire only herself in exchange." These sentiments seemed to him so magnanimous, and so well expressed, that he committed them to memory for the benefit of their object.

On Monday Lady Clitheroe was suffering from nothing but exhaustion, and was quite as well as those who knew her could have expected. Wilfrid had had some sleep in his clothes, but was beginning to look rather done up; Lord Clitheroe tried vainly to prevail on him to go to bed, and only succeeded in inducing him to take a walk, by producing various urgent pieces of business to be transacted in the town of St. Peterport. One of these was to leave word for Ada of the patient's condition. Wilfrid accepted the commissions and started on his way, trudging along between closely-cut hedges that twenty years ago were tangles of beauty, through lanes which once were shady, but which now bear no tokens of their former beauty, except the stiff upright trunks of trees, from which every bough has been lopped away. By the time that he had finished his shadeless walk, and transacted his business in the town, with much ascending and descending of its steep streets and queer short cuts, and found himself before Mr. Plympton's door, he was both hot and tired. Truth to tell, he had been keeping that visit before him as a *bonne bouche* all the time. Ada was becoming associated in his mind with repose and pleasantness; she was sure to be at home, after a tiring day yesterday, and he would rest in the cool drawing-room, and watch her pouring out tea for him and waiting gently on the invalid, and enjoy himself quietly after his anxious days and disturbed nights.

He was wrong in his calculations, however; for the servant informed him that Mr. Plympton and Mrs. Chesney were both out. She thought they would soon be in, though, and asked if he would come in and wait. It was certainly a pleasanter plan than setting out at once on his hot backward tramp, so he entered the little drawing-room, desiring her to tell Mr. Plympton when he came in

that he was here. The French windows stood open as usual, and the part of the lawn next to the house was in shade. A cane lounging-chair stood temptingly placed under some shrubs, a little aside from the window, and there Wilfrid sat him down. Although he could not see the inside of the room, he could hear the moment the door opened, and would show himself as soon as anyone came in. The roadstead lay before him, with the lovely groups of islands beyond, and he remembered how on his first visit Ada had invited him to look at that view, and how he had refused. If he had known how to set about it, he would have blushed to think of his own rudeness.

"I might have treated her with ordinary politeness, at any rate," he growled to himself, "if she *was* my wife. A regular surly brute! I wonder she ever spoke to me again. She's a hundred times too good for me, and that's a fact; and it was a lucky day for her when she got rid of me. It's a pity though that I haven't tumbled into something settled, a practice at Cape Coast Castle, or private physician to King M'Tesa. I should like to have a little place of my own, and Ada to boss it. However, here I am knocking round, and things are best as they are. I've got a very good berth, I know—but —"

Gradually these reflections grew somewhat vague, and the view somewhat misty. Nature had her way, and sleep swallowed him up.

About a quarter of an hour later, Mr. Plympton's bath-chair was wheeled up to the door, with Ada in attendance; and at the same moment Major Bangham arrived from the other direction. He was not lounging along as usual, nor smoking, but had an air of business. His dress was something supreme, and the exquisite rose in his buttonhole amounted to a declaration of marriage. Ada's heart sank; she felt that she had no escape.

"So happy not to have missed you," he said. "I have been unfortunate lately. How do you do, Mr. Plympton?"

"Not quite as well as usual to-day, I think," answered the latter. "I suppose I missed my kind nurse yesterday. Though my nephew came to keep me company, and I was well taken care of by my good Smith," indicating his servant.

"Anyone who has the pleasure of Mrs. Chesney's society must miss her when she withdraws it," replied the Major; "but I trust Lady Clitheroe profited by our loss."

"I left her much better," Ada answered; "but I found Mr. Plympton so much the reverse that I am going to induce him to stay quite quiet for the rest of the day, and to lie down at once. I am afraid going out at all has been imprudent."

"I hope that does not mean that I may not come in. Will you permit me, Mr. Plympton? I particularly wish to speak to Mrs. Chesney."

Nothing would stop him now; he did not even care that Smith

and Jane were listening with undisguised interest. Mr. Plympton gave a ready—though surprised—assent. Smith attended him upstairs, and Jane hurried down to confide to the cook that as sure as possible that fat Major Bangham was come to propose to Mrs. Chesney. As the probability of his doing so had long been a topic of discussion in the domestic circle, it is not to be wondered at that Wilfrid's existence was wholly forgotten in the excitement.

Ada resigned herself to her fate, and walked into the drawing-room. Major Bangham held the door open, and shut it after her, as if he were the spider into whose parlour she—the fly—had walked. She seated herself on the sofa near the window, and plied her fan. He drew a chair exactly opposite her, and sat down.

"I need not tell you," he began, "how deeply disappointed I was at church yesterday."

"Indeed," she replied, demurely; "was not Mr. Lefroy as good as usual?"

"You know that it was not to hear Mr. Lefroy—or any other parson—that I went."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"You know why I went to church yesterday morning."

"Do I?"

Major Bangham shifted on his chair, and pulled a clean bandanna handkerchief out of his pocket. He felt that he was getting on.

"I sent you a note, telling you that I had but one motive for that and everything else, to see you, and—ah—" He put the handkerchief on his knees, and fidgeted a little nearer her.

"That was the note inside the pens," said Ada. "I don't think you did quite make yourself out such a one-idea'd person, but I know you asked me to meet you."

"And you would have come, if you could; would you not? Oh, say you would have come!" He tried to take her hand, but the chairs were not near enough, and it was a failure.

"No, I certainly should not have come. I don't approve of assignments at church, Major Bangham."

"Ah, I am not so good as you. But you shall be my guardian angel, my divinity." He gazed at her ardently, with his head on one side, and fidgeted more with the handkerchief.

"I'm afraid the task would be too formidable for me," answered Ada, with a little choke. "I would rather not undertake it, please."

"Ah, say not so." He had got the handkerchief well spread out now, and down he came fearlessly upon the knees of his new trousers. Ada hid her face in her handkerchief, and he got hold of one hand.

"Ah, say not so. It shall be my study to forestall your every wish. You shall lead me with a rein of silk."

These words were the first which fairly reached the consciousness of the involuntary eavesdropper outside. He opened his eyes in the

bewildered state of a person suddenly aroused from a sound sleep ; he understood what he had heard, but his faculties were all in a whirl, and it was a minute before he realised where he was, and what was going on. In that minute Ada had recovered herself, and when she had spoken, it seemed to him that to show himself would be cruel.

"Indeed, I have no wish to lead you," she said, drawing away her hand. "Please get up, Major Bangham. I would rather hear no more of this kind of talk."

"I will not rise," he returned, in impassioned accents, "until you have granted my prayer. I will not rise until you have promised to be my own. I will not rise—ah —"

"Then, I am afraid you will stay on your knees much longer than you have ever done before. Do get up; I assure you it is ridiculous."

The Major scrambled to his feet with the help of the end of the sofa.

"Ridiculous!" he said sulkily; "I am not accustomed to be considered ridiculous. I do not see what there is absurd in offering my hand where I have already—where I have already —"

"I beg your pardon, really, Major Bangham, if I have hurt your feelings. Forgive me, and let us be friends, and say no more."

"To be sure I will forgive you, my sweet," answered the appeased warrior, thinking the victory won. Before Ada knew what he was doing, he had thrown his arm round her, and was trying to kiss her. She sprang to her feet in a blaze of indignation.

"Major Bangham, you insult me! I am a married woman!"

He fell back slowly, and stared at her.

"Heavens and earth! what do you mean?"

"What I say."

"But you are a widow?"

"I am not, never was; I hope never shall be."

"You told me so."

"I never said a single word about it."

"Your step-son told me so."

"I haven't any step-son."

"That Dr. Chesney—I asked you particularly if he was a relative of the late Mr. Chesney, and you said he was his son."

"His father is dead; he was the late Mr. Chesney. I never said that I was married to him," said Ada, losing her fire as she began to feel ashamed of herself.

"Who are you married to, then, you lying little flirt?" shouted the Major.

"To a man who can protect her from insult," cried Wilfrid, striding in at the window. "Now, then, Major Bangham, if you have anything more to say, you had better say it to me. You have annoyed my wife enough already."

"Well, then, I say that you two have been in a conspiracy to make a fool of me. I don't care how you twist it ; you've told me lies, or made me believe lies ; it's all the same. If my life did not belong to my Queen and my country, I'd have you out to-morrow, and shoot you like a dog—I would. You've made me the laughing-stock of the place between you. But I suppose that was what you wanted to do. It's a—a—it's a shame." He looked round for his hat.

"Well, look here," Major Bangham," said Wilfrid more quietly, "I don't deny that things have been hard on you, and that you have some right to complain. My wife and I, for reasons which are nobody's business but our own, preferred to keep our marriage secret. Of course, this brought about misunderstanding : we were not willing to talk about our affairs, and we let you go on with the idea you had taken up. When you think about it, you'll see that we neither of us told you anything that was not true. All the same, of course there was a little deception, and we are both sorry for the annoyance it has caused you. All I can say is—that what has passed to-day shall not be known through us ; and I hope you will accept my apology in my own and my wife's name for anything that was not quite fair to you."

He held out his hand. Major Bangham hesitated a moment ; then he said, "All right—never mind," shook hands with Wilfrid, bowed to Ada, and left the room.

"There—he's gone," said Wilfrid. "My poor little darling, what a horrid bother for you !" He sat down on the sofa by her, and drew her to him. She rested her head on his shoulder, and cried a little.

"It was all of my own making," she said. "Oh, Wilfrid, I must be—I am—a horrid little flirt ! But I never meant to be so bad. And I never got into a scrape before—never the least bit."

"You never shall get into a scrape again, never the least bit," answered her husband, looking down fondly at the fair head. "I'll take care of you."

"Oh, Wilfrid, can you ? It would be so nice."

"Would it ? Should you really like it, Ada ? You know it was you who sent me away."

"Yes, but I have wanted you so badly lately. And since I saw you I found out—what I never knew before —"

"You found out—what ?"

"That I loved you. Oh, what am I saying ? It's as bad as proposing to you." And she buried her face in his coat, in a sudden rush of shyness.

"Well," he said, with a merry laugh, "I did the business the first time ; it's only fair you should do it the second. Anyway, it's done. And see now, darling ; we two have come together again, and we'll stick together, fair weather or foul, and nothing on earth shall ever part us."

"But how can we do it ?"

"I'll see to that. We'll manage it somehow. What I can't stand is doing without you any longer. I've been fighting hard against it, and trying to believe I didn't care ; but when I heard that fellow making love to my wife—Did he kiss you?"

"Not quite," murmured Ada, hanging down her head.

"Not quite, eh ? Then I will—*quite*, and that shall be our second wedding."

It all came right after that. Mr. Plympton was the good fairy who made everything smooth for the happy lovers. He declared that he could not live at all without Ada, and that he was sure he should live twice as long—not that it mattered much whether he did or not—with Wilfrid. So he offered Wilfrid £200 a year to remain with him as his private physician, Ada continuing to act as nurse and housekeeper, and receive her £100. If they would live with him, he would settle down in his own house in Surrey, and Wilfrid could practise in the neighbourhood.

"I am an old man," he said pathetically, "and a sick one. I can only be a burden to myself and all around me, and I have lost all to whom that burden could be lightened by love. If you two will let me share your happiness, I shall feel that I have a home once more ; and when I die, you will not find yourselves thrown on the world again."

"Dear Mr. Plympton," said Ada, kissing his forehead, "we will be a son and daughter to you."

Wilfrid had only one stipulation to make ; and though that was not an easy one to express, it was finally put into shape. He could only consent to take the best chance he had ever had, if it were made perfectly clear that he and his wife had no designs upon Mr. Plympton's property. When this was with some hesitation explained to Mr. Plympton, he met it by immediately making his will. The Chesneys were not privy to its contents, but Freddy Whipple was ; and as he declared himself perfectly satisfied with its provisions, Wilfrid's scruples were appeased, and he consented to be happy.

The Clitheroes were in despair when they first heard the news, but after a time reconciled themselves to the loss of Wilfrid, by observing that there was no good in keeping him ; for from the day when he became—as Lady Clitheroe put it—"engaged to his wife," he was just as useless to anybody else as a boy in his first love-fit. In truth, he *was* in love—for the first time in his life, and very pleasant he found it. So pleasant that he has never emerged from that condition, although he is now a noted provincial physician, and Mr. Plympton (who, being at all times only half alive, is likely to make life last twice as long as anybody else) calls himself a grandfather. Ada has grown plump, and says she has given up flirting. There may be two opinions on that point. But there can be only one as to whether she ever regrets that she proposed to her husband.

THE LAST OF THE BEVERLEYS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "GENTLEMAN STEPHENS," ETC.

IN a remote country region, rendered in winter almost inaccessible by the overflowing of two neighbouring rivers, stood at the beginning of this century a house called Bothwell Hall.

Even now, although the sound of the railway whistle reaches the spot, it might safely challenge most places in England for thorough-going seclusion, while there are dismal elements enough and to spare in the mists that float up, ghost-like, across the river meadows, the high and unkempt fences feathered at the top by significant willows and alders, and the many monotonous lanes that intersect this region. Wholly impassable in wet seasons except by boats, which are in good and sober earnest put in frequent requisition by the farmers and other inhabitants around, these lanes are at the best of times so full of ruts as to try the fibre of the most highly-patented carriage-springs. Subtract some seventy years from this year of 1884 and it will be found natural enough that some surprise was felt in the neighbourhood when the Lady Griselda Venner accepted the hand of Humphrey Beverley, of Bothwell Hall.

But her father, Lord Westerley, with more children on his hands than he knew what to do with, and with means scarcely equal to his position, was not sorry to draft one daughter on to that of a fairly wealthy commoner like Humphrey Beverley, especially as the Beverleys could boast of an indisputably good pedigree, the title deeds of Bothwell Park going back to the days of the Plantagenets.

Lady Griselda was one of a bevy of beautiful sisters, and not the least ambitious among them ; but the objects she sought were admiration, with an unlimited licence to do whatever she listed : these granted, and she installed sovereign lady of her own will, she did not particularly insist upon rank and an enormous establishment as necessary to the salvation of her ease of mind.

For her first few seasons Lady Griselda Venner had shrugged her shoulders at marriage ; her flirtations had been many and intoxicating, but her head was never for a moment in danger of being thwarted in its schemes by her heart. The beautiful eyes, that took away both the heads and hearts of her lovers, never lost a point in the game she loved to play ; and she played it, as will be seen, to the end.

Lord Westerley and family were down at one of their country houses, some dozen or so miles from Bothwell Hall, when Lady Griselda met Humphrey Beverley for the first time. It was at a ball, and his warm admiration, more apparent and unsophisticated than that to which she was accustomed, gave her a new sensation. The

acquaintance was prosecuted. Lady Griselda's sisters teased her about her country admirer, and there were, of course, rumours of a rival, to whom Humphrey had shown some attention. Then came a heavenly August day when the Westerley party went, by Humphrey's invitation, to pic-nic at the Hall. Everyone raved about its romantic solitude, its panelled rooms, the primitive gates in some of the passages and landings, the family portraits, and the silver and old china that appeared in abundance when the profuse luncheon Humphrey had provided for his guests was brought out under the trees, as well as at the equally profuse tea that awaited them later on in the dining-room. The gay party, pleased with a novel entertainment, and finding in their handsome host a romantic variety to the type of men with whom they were most familiar, used to Court and London ways, praised all they saw with well-bred extravagance ; and in truth there was much that deserved admiration.

It was not a grand place, but it was very charming. The orchards laden with fruit were a sight to see, and the grounds about the house were decorated with peacocks and griffins and fancy arbours, and shapes of many descriptions cut out in box and yew. The quaint garden too was perfect of its kind, complete with dial and rockery-work, old-fashioned flowers richly coloured, as August flowers must always be, a regiment of snails in the box borders, and ribbon grass with no blades alike. Humphrey made an admirably attentive host, and he was so great a favourite that until late in the day he saw far less of Lady Griselda than had become usual in their recent meetings.

It gave her leisure to observe his popularity with others. Many of the guests, although of the immediate neighbourhood, were strangers to Lady Griselda, for the Westerleys lived but little at that time in Sloughshire, and she soon perceived there was no lack of candidates for the honour of presiding at Bothwell, and that by all the laws of probability and vanity of man that post would not be left much longer vacant. Her father, her sisters, her fellow guests were enthusiastic in praise of the Hall and its surroundings, and why should she not take it at their valuation ? Others coveted the prize ; there would be pleasure in disappointing them all and securing it to herself : and a husband like Humphrey, unused to any save country ways, would surely interfere but little with her freedom.

He and she were the last couple to return to the house, after a parting stroll through the shrubberies, and as they lingered in the hall her nosegay that he had gathered for her fell from her conniving hand, and she must needs sit on the lowest step of the staircase, and with her very own fingers re-arrange its disorder. He leant on the carved oak balustrade, watching her dexterous handling of the flowers, and looking at her auburn hair—the rarest tint of the kind he had ever seen—at her beautiful face, with its arched eyebrows and aristocratic features and its delicate skin, more delicate by reason of a few most exquisite freckles. He yearned with love towards her, and

with regret over his own deficiencies. Could he ever hope to grow worthy of so much beauty, innocence, and grace?

Such were his thoughts. Man-like, he made no allowance for the nature within being possibly at variance with the fair exterior, and the hour was too strong for him. Gazing at her thus in silence for some moments, he spoke his thoughts aloud; and, crowning triumph of that happy day, he was not repulsed. There, in that old hall, their fate was sealed, and their lives were linked each with each, for good or for ill, until death should them part.

In due course of time the wedding followed. In the interim Lady Griselda had impressed her lover in some inexplicable way, for it was not in plain English, that she had stooped low and sacrificed much in accepting his hand; and he had promised she should go to London every Spring; had promised that his life, not blameless in the past, should be reformed on all points in the future; had promised—oh, who could say all he promised, and was willing to promise, if only she would indeed come to Bothwell Hall to be its pearl, its flower, its guardian angel, and his most faultless wife?

And so the marriage took place, and Lady Griselda Venner became Lady Griselda Beverley.

Humphrey belonged to that species of country squire which, let us please ourselves by imagining, is in the present day extinct, but which, in the early part of the century knew more about the pedigrees of their favourite hounds and horses than that of the monarchy of England, and held an unwritten code of laws that required a gentleman and M. F. H. to forget as soon as possible, and as a point of honour, the classics and mathematics with which he had been regaled (with due accompaniments) at the public schools. The foreign politics of these gentlemen were not complicated, but consisted in a firm belief that England knew what was proper and right for all nations a good deal better than the nations did themselves, and could and would beat them by land and sea to the tune of "Rule Britannia" as often as occasion required. Home politics were, on the contrary, a mighty occasion of words and blows, especially when they touched local interests, and election times were half-carnival, half-Pandemonium. The hunting-field was Elysium, literature nowhere, and the feudal system, with all its sins that now, no doubt, we have expunged, and its dear old kindly virtues that we still regret, was carried out in some of its most cardinal points on large and small estates alike. Ecclesiastical matters troubled nobody much, not even the parsons, and drinking was conducted on liberal, not to say lavish principles.

To that species and those days, then, belonged Humphrey, carrying on the traditions of his fathers with unswerving faith, but stamping his own individuality none the less on his tenure of power at Bothwell Hall. He was the only son of his parents, and prized and spoilt accordingly. His father's eyes glistened with pride as he tossed the handsome boy on his shoulders for a visit to the kennel; and every

servant and labourer on the estate vied with each other to abet his whims, and to initiate him into the mysteries, legal or otherwise, of those field sports so dear to the hearts of Britons.

It was hard to say whether the Squire punished himself or Humphrey most when at last the lad was sent to school; but a certain quiet influence, of which we have yet to speak, was no longer to be resisted, and in the doubtful hope that Master Humphrey might now be induced for the first time in his life to sit quiet at his books for half an hour, he was sent to Harrow, and the echoes of home were silent to his merry laugh and boyish shouts. Everyone missed and regretted him; and the Squire on his return from escorting the boy to his new abode drank quantities of bottled ale and port.

But Humphrey's parting words to his father had been, "Be sure to tell mamma to write to me often, and to write plain, and tell her I won't forget to try to be a good boy."

This mother of Humphrey's gave him, as mothers often do, and, alas, often do not, his first idea of excellency in woman. Her beautiful oval face, the regular features of which he inherited, was to him more sacred than any of the Madonnas. Calm, noble-minded, unselfish, loving, she was spending herself devotedly for husband and son, and fulfilling all her duties faithfully and unostentatiously. Content with the age in which she lived, she yet wished that her boy should rise above it, be more cultivated, more fit to be the master of others.

For the destiny of the young life of Humphrey she felt she stood in part responsible, and that from her training and example his first bias must of necessity be taken. Perhaps it would seem from the foregoing picture of Humphrey's boyhood that she succeeded but ill; but many other influences, and some harmful enough, were at work on him: over-indulgence, flattery, and surrounding licence.

But let those who think she failed, remember this: Humphrey to the end of his days could scarcely speak her name with clear voice and dry eyes; he never asked pardon of an offended Maker without feeling he had sinned also against her who had taught him so much better. He never gave up the hope that in his wife he might meet again her rare sweet goodness and wise ways; never until in his married days the hag Disappointment revealed her hideous shape and pointed the road to Despair.

Humphrey was left master of himself and Bothwell Hall at an early age, for the Squire and his wife both died prematurely; and by the time he attained his majority, the loss of his parents had become an outgrown grief, unconnected with the present, although tenderly honoured in remembrance. The hatchment was down, the flags of rejoicing were up, and it takes but a few years to make up a long ago at twenty-one.

He was a handsome and popular young man; and with no particularly wise counsellor at his side to keep him in check it was small

wonder that he fell a good deal in love with his fortunes and himself. Warm-hearted by nature, intoxicated by the rare atmosphere he breathed on the heights of youth and pleasure, he thought life and liberty perfection, and meant to do always well ; when lo, first came one slip and slide, and then another, and he found he did ill instead of well, the rare heights had been profaned, and the good intentions were not so easy to carry out.

That beginning was only too typical of his bachelor career. His was essentially a sinning and repenting nature, like the old Squire's before him, but the passions of the son ran deeper than those of the father. He could not sin and repent, or love and lament in moderation ; and since pride and shyness made him reserved about his feelings, in spite of his popularity, the storms within him often left him spent and shattered ; and his life, as time went on, was not very happy. But he had not forgotten his mother, and always meant to marry someone who should be marvellously like her, and make the old hall again the happy orderly home of his boyhood. And now that he was well over thirty he would probably have soon made choice not far amiss among the pretty daughters of his fellow squires, if Fate had not brought Lady Griselda across his path.

It was all quick work then. Good-bye to other maidens for evermore. The pretty girl who had known him since childhood, and on whom he had spent a great many smiles ere Lady Griselda's advent, had scarcely time to realise the situation and take up her disappointment ere she heard he was fairly engaged. She was a good, true-hearted girl, although she has nothing to do with the further history of Beverley, and nursed a memory of a few bright scenes of which he was the hero to the end of her days : and so, missing a wife who would well have filled his mother's place, and had already learned to love him, to her cost, Humphrey wedded a woman who was incapable of any deep affection, and was, moreover, destined to bring ill-fortune and grim disaster to his hearth.

The first few months of their married life passed well enough. No woman could be wholly insensible to such devotion as Humphrey showed his bride, and the novelty of her surroundings had a charm.

But Lady Griselda was one who must tyrannise over affection ; she loved to tease Humphrey even in these early days, although she knew from report, though not as yet from experience, that his temper was one dangerous to rouse. Also, if visitors were not, and no diversion called them from home, she very soon began to shrug her shoulders at a wet day, or even a quiet one, to bury herself in French novels, or oftener still retire with her maid to the study of French toilettes, and her own fine figure and face when adorned with the same. The cares of housekeeping she delegated to the housekeeper, and referred everyone who troubled her to Mr. Beverley ; and thus studiously avoiding the responsibilities of her lot, while she maintained firm hold on its privileges, she started on her career as wife.

There was no lack of company at the Hall that winter. The wedding festivities were prolonged ; and Humphrey, profuse at all times in his hospitality, felt proud that his beautiful wife should be admired by his neighbours, and was glad to welcome her friends.

Then came the London season ; Lady Griselda's attendance at which lasted much longer than Humphrey had understood her to intend, and his impatience for her return was great. He had stayed in town himself for a few weeks, for his ideas were strong on the subject of married life, with its duties and pleasures ; but like many who have taken free latitude of enjoyment in younger days, he was now extremely anxious to lead an exemplary life and attend well to his duties as a country gentleman. Seasonable pleasures should not be forgotten, and in all measures, domestic and otherwise, he would be aided by his wife. So he hoped : not knowing as yet that he had taken counterfeit for coin, and that it would not pass in the market, and bring him those goods that he required.

Lady Griselda returned overdone with gaiety, yet disgusted with her home and inclined to think her marriage an ignominious mistake. Humphrey's warm welcome, his caresses and devotion, all bored her heartily, and though she made little outward opposition to his domestic views and plans, she was secretly determined they should not be carried out. She had asked a sufficient number of people to visit her to prevent much possibility of quiet for some time to come, and she traded on Humphrey's hospitality to keep him from giving his guests the cold shoulder.

As time went on, that hospitality was put to the proof in no small measure, especially as by degrees the fact dawned on Mr. Beverley that the visitors Lady Griselda most delighted to honour were those least suited to his taste, and who amalgamated but ill with his own straightforward, honest intentioned, though ill-regulated nature. The times were out of joint, but he would scarcely allow it, even to his own heart, still less admit a doubt of his wife's affection to himself, even though the proofs given him of it grew fewer and fewer, and the time she spent in his companionship, or rather in that dual solitude that he desired, was ever less and less.

He tried to win her to quieter ways in vain ; then he flung himself headlong into the dissipation of the hour, and tried to believe that he was happy. All delusion would have been over much sooner with most men than it was with Humphrey, but he had built too largely on the hope of an ideal marriage to believe quickly that the foundations were baseless.

Another autumn and winter came and went ; another London season ; and still Humphrey nursed the hope that his own mismanagement and ancient over-fondness for pleasure had somehow been to blame, and that it was not Griselda's fault altogether. Other eyes were clearer ; and indeed Lady Griselda, from being simply a heartless flirt, was rapidly degenerating into worse, and becoming

more dependent on excitement and conquest. No children came to bless this union, and with their little loving, unconscious hands draw tighter the wedded bonds that had begun to slacken.

The servants, with whom Humphrey was a universal favourite, while Lady Griselda was secretly despised and disliked, saw enough to make them whisper and shake their heads ; and nothing but wilful blindness made Humphrey ignore so long the fact that sighs came easier to him than smiles, that Lady Griselda's principles were not as faultless as her features, and that their differences were something more than "lovers' quarrels." As the little rift within the lute, the one drop from the reservoir, the petal fallen from the full-blown rose, are the insignificant, but sure heralds of disaster, so the slight incidents of life will often reveal the secret of a dead or dying affection.

One fine September morning, when a party of visitors, who had been spending some weeks at the Hall, had just driven off, Humphrey espied his wife feeding the peacocks on the grass in front of the house. He hastened to join her in the best of spirits, and would have put his arm around her waist.

The lady of Bothwell Hall was not in the mood for these little attentions. Humphrey gave her as true an attachment as it is in the power of man to bestow, and she despised him in return ; but one of the gentlemen just departed, although she half-guessed him to be as heartless as herself, had inspired her with something as near to passion as she was capable of feeling. Some of his fine compliments and flattering looks were filling her thoughts now, as she threw an occasional dole half-absently to the peacocks.

"Hurrah for a little solitude!" said Humphrey. "I declare I never was so glad to see the backs of any people before, and I don't care who calls me inhospitable for saying so ; but it is something to have you all to myself for two quiet days and evenings."

"You forget," Griselda said, carelessly bribing the handsomest peacock to a nearer approach, only to disappoint him by tossing the gift to another, "we go to-morrow evening to the ball at Baggely."

"Nonsense!" said Humphrey, with a little laugh, "you don't mean that seriously. A public ball twenty miles off, and nobody there we want to see. We will have a dance together out here instead ; our ball-room will be a finer one than theirs, and cooler too in this weather."

He spoke gaily, and helping himself to her bread, began throwing it to the peacocks too. They looked such a handsome, happy couple in the sunshine, with the peacocks swaying their bright-eyed trains around, and the old-fashioned picturesque house as a background, that it seems terribly ill to remember that treachery lay in the heart of one of them.

"You can do as you like, of course," said the loving wife, "but certainly mean to go, and I told our guests so only this morning."

"Why, what difference does that make? They will be there, no

doubt; but I am not going to drive twenty miles for the pleasure of seeing them again. No, Grizel, do not disappoint me of these two days. I want our life to be a quieter one, my dear; we see too little of each other with these perpetual visitors, and I do not care a brass farthing for any one of them beside my bonnie wife."

One of the peacocks saw an angry gleam in Lady Griselda's handsome eyes. "You know I hate sentiment," she said; "and as for the ball I really cannot think of giving it up: for nothing, too."

"Are my wishes nothing?"

"Here is Mr. Fordyce coming," said she: "and I think interruptions are blessings to a matrimonial tête à tête."

"Do you mean that?" began Humphrey, hotly; but his wife had already advanced towards the visitor.

Mr. Fordyce was the clergyman of the parish, and he loved Humphrey as a father. He was a quaint old figure, and sometimes afforded food for mirth to Lady Griselda, who loved to puzzle him with gay raillyery. She now pressed him to continue there for the remainder of the day, and it pleased her to be very gracious to him, and to pilot him round the garden and along the shrubberies to spots that he knew far better than she.

Dinner at Bothwell Hall was served at five o'clock, and Humphrey was beguiled out of all ill-humour by his wife's wit and fascination at that meal. She had but an old-fashioned country parson upon whom to exercise them, but vanity like hers is a very ostrich in its diet. Now she rallied him on some sly allusion, of which he was as innocent as the chair whereon he sat; now her pretty white teeth flashed out in laughter, either with him or at him, but veiled under a sufficient pretext for Humphrey to join in with a clear conscience; and now she would press the parson to some especial dainty with a charm which, to Humphrey, seemed to combine all perfection in its wiles. So lost was he in admiration that when left with his guest and the decanters, he could not leave the topic, but talked to his old friend more like a lover of his wife than a husband, of her superiority to other women, her beauty and her charm. His spirits had returned with interest, and neither he nor Mr. Fordyce spared the wine as they passed from one pleasant topic to another in the familiar old dining-room.

"And now we will go to Grizel," said Humphrey, blithely, as they rose at last, "and she shall give us some of her best songs, for I know you like her singing."

"Assuredly," said Mr. Fordyce, adding mentally, "a good deal better than I like herself: she'll be a thorn to him yet." But when they reached the drawing-room my lady was not there. Humphrey rang the bell, and made enquiries for her, when he was told that her ladyship had a headache, and would not come down stairs any more that evening.

With a slight frown on his brow, he went up at once to his

wife's room, and found the invalid lying on a sofa reading a French novel.

"Why, Grizel," said he, "is your head really bad? Will it not be well enough to give us some singing? Fordyce wants so much to hear you again."

"He will most likely have plenty of opportunities for that," said Lady Griselda, carelessly, not looking up from her book. "I cannot go down stairs again to-night."

"But if your head is not well enough for singing, surely reading does not make it better," said Humphrey, with more truth than tact. "See now, I don't want you to sing or do anything to make it worse, only come down just to be with us. We are as quiet as possible."

"Thank you, I have had enough of the old man for one day," said Lady Griselda; "you can entertain him now. I mean to rest this evening so as to be fresh for the ball to-morrow night."

"I thought you had given that up; but no doubt I was a fool for thinking so," said her husband, and turned in silence to the door.

The Humphrey that rejoined Mr. Fordyce was not the Humphrey of the dinner-table; but his abstraction was wisely ignored by his companion. As the clergyman walked home across the fields he shook his head several times with a threatening frown. His mother-wit had long seen through every wile and grace of Lady Griselda, and he pondered with grief and apprehension over a certain look of misery, betrayed more than once that evening by Humphrey's face.

The day following passed slowly for Humphrey. Too proud to again ask his wife to put aside her pleasure for his sake, he ordered the carriage in her hearing to be in readiness to convey her to the ball, cherishing a hope even to the eleventh hour that she meant to countermand it. Lady Griselda did nothing of the kind. She took her husband's arm to walk to the carriage and wished him a pleasant evening as calmly as if she had obeyed his every wish, feeling very thankful all the time that he was staying at home instead of inflicting his presence upon her. The carriage drove off, and Humphrey Beverley re-entered the house with a strange feeling that a new phase in his life had begun.

He ignored the truth to himself no longer; he knew his wife not only did not love him, but cared no more for his wishes or happiness than the thrush on the lawn cares for the worm it devours. He looked at the prospect before him with an amazement of distress that left him mute. Happiness then had failed him, nay, the very dearest hope and purpose of his life, and no thoroughfare seemed open to him to continue on his way. A strongly loving nature was thrown back upon itself; a proud and passionate man was set at nought by a heartless and beautiful woman, whom he loved distractedly, and an undisciplined heart had now no guiding star.

The episode of the ball went by. New visitors arrived at Bothwell

Hall, and life went on in its accustomed channel, but all was changed for Humphrey Beverley. All things, animate and inanimate seemed to have taken a hideous turn.

Lady Griselda was enjoying the excitement of a flirtation with the gentleman to whom allusion has been made. Into the details there is no need to enter. That she was guilty at heart has sufficiently been shown, but she was too selfishly awake to her own interests to risk her reputation seriously, although the neighbourhood indulged in whispered comments on the general levity of her deportment. Humphrey's popularity in the county, and the high-standing and character of Lady Griselda's father, gave her an immunity from open disapproval, that her own beauty and charm might not have commanded. But the hour of her triumph was not to last.

As the months rolled on, Humphrey realised it all, and saw no outlet from his troubles. Sometimes he became violently jealous, when stormy scenes would ensue; but oftener he was sunk in an intense inner despondency, of which the chief sign was a scornful indifference to what went on. Though he were to dismiss the almost constant guests and refuse to allow his wife to visit, what then?—he knew her affections were not his. Every new vanity, every fresh admirer might chain her fancy for a time; for him alone there never came a softening glance or loving word: and after a few mad or futile attempts to woo her anew, Humphrey accepted his doom and brooded over the ruin of his hopes with that useless persistency which bodes trouble. He hunted recklessly, drank deeply, and was the one moody figure in the gay scenes into which he accompanied his wife.

Now and then he would watch her from behind a newspaper or book, smiling with her admirers around, and would wonder in wearying circles of thought why everyone seemed easily to please her, and only he, with a love that had outlived his respect for her, alone failed. Sometimes he would steal off alone to the dining-room where the portraits of his parents hung, as if seeking their advice or sympathy. They were not masterpieces of art. Mr. Beverley was in his red hunting-coat and other accoutrements of sport ostentatiously insisted on; but the artist in a happy moment of inspiration had fixed on the canvas a real likeness of his wife's sweet, good face. Humphrey knew now that in his own wife he had been duped by beauty unhallowed by the graces and womanly wisdom that had sanctified that of his mother. That pictured face had in it thought and sympathy and counsel for others; there had been harmony and happiness where that face dwelt, as he well knew; and best of all, she had been the priestess in her own home of that religion, which now seemed banished from his all-but Pagan household. One day, as he gazed, his wife's heartless laugh pealed out from the drawing-room, and voices rose in jesting dispute. Humphrey leant his forehead against the frame of his mother's picture

and groaned, and the butler who had come in, tray in hand, beat a hasty and noiseless retreat, sighing deeply over the ill fate of the master, whom he had held in his arms as a baby.

Only one scene more.

It was winter and the floods were out. Bothwell Hall was not wholly shut out from communication with the world, but the lanes that lay between it and the high road were half under water, and travelling along them was neither pleasant nor expeditious. The Beverleys were engaged for an evening party at a house some ten miles off, where the wedding gaieties of one of Humphrey's especial friends were being celebrated. They were to stay at this place for some days; but in the deep gloom that had settled on his spirits Humphrey could with difficulty rouse up to pay the visit, and but for loyal friendship's sake would have declined it altogether.

The last week had been one of intense dreariness at the Hall, the heavy rains having kept its master and mistress close prisoners, and thrown them entirely on each other's society. Who can wonder that the storms within doors had fairly matched the raging elements without? Angry words, then sullen silence, then Humphrey sitting long and late over the wine that befriended him only to betray, and Lady Griselda fighting the meagrits in her own comfortable domains. That had been the history of the few days; and now the one had come on which they were to start for the aforesaid visit.

"Remember," said Humphrey, rising from the luncheon-table, and from a weary and overwarm discussion in which he knew she had been wrong, but had not the consolation of feeling he had been right, "not to be late in starting this evening. I have told you the hour, and it is the latest I can give you, for the roads are at their worst, and Raymond cannot manage them like old John."

"And why is John not to drive?" asked Lady Griselda.

"Why, you know the poor old fellow has a racking cough! I would sooner stop at home than take him out in such weather."

"Nonsense," said Lady Griselda; "Raymond drives like a fool. If *you* care to coddle your servants, *I* do not. John can drive."

"John is *not* to drive," said her husband decidedly. "The man who has been our family's faithful servant all his days shall not have his life risked by me. So remember, if you please, to be ready at the given hour: do not keep me waiting as you did last time."

Lady Griselda was playing with her poodle, and gave a derisive little laugh.

"Do you hear me, Griselda?" asked Humphrey.

"I hear you," she replied, "and shall be ready—at my own time."

She could play on Humphrey's ill-trained passions as on a child's, and she knew it. He stamped his foot impatiently, and turned a darkened face on her.

"By heavens, how you try me!" he exclaimed. "Understand me once for all, Griselda. Be ready this evening, or —"

"A few more black looks, a few more polite speeches for me, I suppose," interrupted she, with a laughing contempt that might have driven a calmer man than Humphrey to white heat.

"No," said her husband, in tragic earnest. "Be ready; or I swear it shall be the last time I leave it in your power to disobey my wishes or break my heart."

A dreary afternoon passed. The wind moaned through the trees and wet shrubberies; within doors it seemed that ghosts were wailing along the passages with their old-fashioned gates, and down the long staircase and across the hall. Tick, tick, went the clock in Lady Griselda's sitting-room, and it told her, loudly as voice of clock could do, that it was time to go and dress. She did hear it. It broke the sense of her novel over and over again, secretly disturbed her ease of mind, her power of enjoyment, but it did not send her to dress. She heard her husband come in and go to his room. Her maid came to remind her it was getting late, and was dismissed with a nod. At last she rose from her sofa, surveyed her fine features in the mirror, and then with leisurely steps she went into her chamber.

The carriage came round to the hall door at the appointed hour, the servants were in attendance. Humphrey walked down stairs a little slowly, and sent up to tell Lady Griselda that it was time to start. All the servants doated on Humphrey, and the old butler now glanced pityingly at the white changed face of his master and its stern look. The footman came back to say her ladyship would not be ready for a while yet; which message Humphrey received in silence but strode upstairs to his wife's room.

He opened the door and looked in. She was seated before her glass looking very beautiful, but not half-dressed yet; her maid was arranging flowers in her hair. Many a pretty trinket and bauble lay around in confusion, but the jewel she was toying with half-absently could not be colder than she. There were plenty of lights around, and as Humphrey stood still for a moment the eyes of husband and wife met in the looking-glass and spoke, although their lips were mute. The next minute Humphrey left the room, and while the frightened maid strove with anxiety that defeated its own end to hasten that ill-starred toilette, a sharp, clear sound rang through the house—the report of a pistol. The maid gave a piercing shriek as if she had herself been wounded; confused sounds came from below, and Lady Griselda, white, but calm, flung a shawl round her and went downstairs.

There at the foot of the staircase where they had plighted their betrothal, with his handsome face still troubled, lay Humphrey Beverley, shot through the heart by his own misguided hand. The servants were already grouped around, their faces aghast with

sorrow and dismay, and the old butler who supported Humphrey in his arms, sobbed like a child over the man he had loved and honoured above peer or king.

Erring, tempted, fallen, yet beloved so tenderly by those who knew him best and longest, let us say a prayer for the peace of the soul of Humphrey Beverley, no matter what may be our creed.

The story made a sensation, but, as in most such cases, there was much of it hushed out. Lady Griselda went back to her own family, where perhaps less was known than elsewhere of the sins and shortcomings of her married life. Two years onwards, and she eloped with a certain married nobleman; which caused more stir than had her husband's death.

Bothwell Hall being entailed on male heirs, became an object of contest between two Beverleys, distant cousins of Humphrey in about the same degree. While Chancery pondered their claims, the deserted house passed slowly into decay. It never again became a dwelling-house, unless for certain denizens of the shadowy world by whom it was said, and is still said, to be haunted. When ultimately a possessor to the estate was established in his claims, he being non-resident, preferred building a modern farm-house for his tenant on a more cheery site, and the shrubberies and gardens were thrown open and converted into pasture-land.

I have seen the ruins. They stand in a broad flat meadow with trees scattered about them. Only a few bare walls stand upright with window apertures, and chimneys from which smoke will never more wave its hospitable banner. A portion of the fine staircase is there; and those who are so minded may look on the very spot where the last of the Beverleys sought and met his end.

As I stood gazing at it there was a sudden shuffling and stumbling sound heard in the ivy, and then a great dusty white owl flew out from the ruin, and dodging in and out among the trees took its unsteady flight towards the river, as if tired of loneliness. Not feeling quite sure what the next sight would be with which I might be favoured in the gathering shades of evening, I turned away; but every lane seemed full of the tragedies, the strange stories and the unexplained mysteries of the past.

Let me give a voice, however inadequate, to one of these: that the wind may wail less sadly over Bothwell Hall, and the spectre of the last of the Beverleys be laid to rest.



A NEW ZEALAND MAIL-DAY.

TO-DAY the English mail is in, and all the little town is about and astir. There, at the wooden wharf, lies the steamer that has brought it from the North, and which in another hour or two will carry on the Southern portion. Upon the public buildings there flutters in the languid breeze the flag that announces to the town the fact of the mail's arrival. The sleepy little place seems wide awake this morning. Late comers are hurrying to the tiny post-office with expectant faces, passing those earlier ones, who have already obtained their budgets, with only a word or nod. What a clatter in the dusty street as strange uncouth and bearded men come cantering up—they always canter—and wend their heated way to the little wooden building that does duty as post-office amidst many other functions. Let us go too.

I fasten my horse to one of the posts in front of the buildings, put there for that purpose, and cram myself into the little office that is already as full as it can well hold. A poky little place it is, suffocatingly hot to-day, although its one window is thrown wide open. The holland blind is swaying to and fro, as though the room, as well it might, were panting for breath. A row of little pigeon-holes, in which dirty-looking letters sometimes lie for months until claimed by some up-country shepherd; a narrow counter with a blotted leaden inkstand and a desk, with a faded green curtain, is all the furniture.

How good-naturedly everybody waits his turn to reach the counter, and what sun-burnt, ruddy faces they mostly present! Here is a woman who has driven in from some outlying district, where there are roads; and she is dressed—heavens, in what strange colours is she not dressed! They much affect, these women, a violent and truly awful purple, which they call, I believe, "puce;" their bonnets are large, and, if the lady is elderly, umbrageous; therein repose whole banks of flowers, chiefly pink roses, reclining on trusses of the most verdant moss. Their husbands, if accompanying their spouses, are dissolving in suits of abnormally shiny black, and hats of a loftiness and hardness not to be described. If they are alone they look much better in their moleskin trousers, flannel shirts, and soft felt hats. They all have pipes in their mouths, but are not smoking in the building.

What a chattering is going on, and how active are the generally sleepy clerk and the small boy who assists him upon these occasions. It is a wonder to me, however some of these letters reach their destination, for, when the meaning of the series of hieroglyphics is deciphered, the address is often found to be almost as obscure.

Here, just now, a great, red-bearded Hercules is making room at the counter for a little, quiet, subdued widow, evidently a resident in the town, who, dry-lipped and tremulous, awaits an answer to her question : " Anything for me this time, Mr. Wilson ? " and turns away, poor little soul, with something very like a sob as the clerk gives, what is, I fear, his usual answer : " No, not this mail, Mrs. Thorpe." She hastily pulls down the veil of her rusty black bonnet and moving quickly to the door, walks away silently with the child that has been sitting on the sand, awaiting her outside.

The big man himself is being served now, and receives a bundle of papers that will amuse him for nights in his solitary hut " on the run." One letter only is his, sealed with a slab of red wax, but this he receives with evident satisfaction ; and, with a bashful grin, as though everyone must know from whom it comes, he retires.

Many more are served, and some few disappointed, and then comes my turn. I cannot help a foolish sort of smile curving my lips as I see each familiar handwriting. When my packet is complete, a large and glorious one this mail, I too go out. And what to do, think you ? Tear open my letters and devour the contents then and there ? No such thing ; I've grown too wise for that. I puzzle myself delightfully over any unfamiliar writing ; I feel each envelope to see how thick the letter inside may be and so judge of its length ; I pinch it, and so discover if there may be, by any chance, a photograph inside. If there be, my resolution not to open my letters in the town is generally broken, and I hasten to see what " dear familiar face " it may contain. Ah ! dear friends and true, if only you could know the keen delight it is to an exile to have a letter from the old country, you would never fail to write. No matter how few words, it shows that one is not forgotten. In these great wildernesses we have more time for thoughts of home and friends than those we left behind have to think of us, and it *does* wound to think that, absent, we are not remembered.

I lead my horse away and feed him, for we have come far since early morning, and whilst he takes his rest I visit " the store," where I have to make a whole list of purchases, for not often do I get the chance. A wonderful place, too, this store is. Not only is it the emporium of grocery, literature, saddlery and drugs, but it devotes one counter to haberdashery and the fine arts ; and in a small room at the back, screened from the vulgar gaze by muslin curtains, the wife of the store-keeper displays what are evidently very home-made " Modes de Paris."

One hears the rustle of letters in almost every quiet corner of the town, where someone has gone to read his news. How oblivious of all that is going on around him is that tall young fellow sitting on a rail of the pound ! What brings him here with his refined-looking face and artist bearing ? Surely he can't be happy with sheep and tallow and wool as sole topics of thought and con-

versation? Why, his eyes are humid now with tears, and yet his lips are half smiling as he turns the page. That letter is from his old home, I swear, by his look. His sister, maybe, is telling him that the village looks just the same, and that she visits still the old grey church nestling amongst the trees where of yore they prayed together. That lad is a better lad than he was an hour ago. The light of sweet, sad memories shines from his eyes, and his face is beautiful with the feeling he forgets to hide. Happy it is for us that those thin sheets can convey so much, and that the senders can, as it were, write themselves on to the pages. Yet at times how inadequate seem the most glowing words when a smile from love-lit eyes, or a touch of some dear hand, at once would say what all words fail to do.

The shopping done, I start for my home amongst the hills, passing at the entrance of the town the noisy "Bar" that always drives a roaring trade on Mail-day. Some silent savages are crouching in their blankets on the step. At first my road lies along the harbour shore; the sun has sunk some time behind the rounded hills. Across the darkening water the opposite range of mountains is arraying itself in its gorgeous vesture of evening crimson, which deepens to dark purple in the folds of the hills. Light wreaths of summer mist rise from the harbour and drape the distant rocks, which grow darker and dimmer as the gold fades from the azure of the sky. The heaven is now as one great pearl, and through its tender tones there now shine out the golden stars, and Canopus and Acherner divide with Sirius the realm of night, till they too fade in the greater radiance of the rising moon.

By her friendly light my horse—I leave it to him—finds his way along the track, for I have long left the road and am now upon the hills. Soon I am home at my hut, having passed through the deep blackness of the last bit of bush, and brushed aside the last frond of tree-fern, and turning my horse loose in the home paddock, I enter my whare. Quickly have I finished my supper, yesterday's damper does, and pulling my box to the fire, for the nights are chill up here though the days are hot, I am rapidly immersed in my much long-wished-for letters.



A CROSS AT KILBARRACK.

BY E. OWENS BLACKBURNE.

SOMEWHAT less than one hundred years ago, when Francis Higgins, the notorious "Sham Squire" of Dublin Society bequeathed his body to Kilbarrack churchyard, the place was even more lonely and picturesque-looking than it is at present. Bleak and desolate, it is situated upon the southern margin of the beautiful Bay of Dublin. In the midst of the churchyard is a little ruined chapel, which was built by the hardy, pious fishermen of the district, that their wives and children might there offer up prayers for their safety whilst they were away gathering the harvest of the ocean.

In the little churchyard of Kilbarrack many generations of the rude forefathers of the neighbouring hamlets of Kilbarrack, Bald Doyle, Sutton, and Howth sleep their last long sleep. It is also the repository of the remains of many of a higher rank in life than the fishing class already alluded to; for old tombstones and headstones, with preposterous spelling and epitaphs thereon, mark many a family burial-place—notably that of Margaret Lawless, the mother of the incorruptible patriot peer, Lord Cloncurry. Her tomb is beside the traditionary grass-grown grave of the "Sham Squire," unfit company for even the mortal remains of so noble a woman.

The whole neighbourhood is rife with traditions, and one of its latest, most tragic, and most pathetic, forms the framework of this veritable story.

Looking westward from the old church of Kilbarrack, you can see Ireland's Eye, Lambay Island, and Howth Harbour; and right in sight of them, leaning against the outer walls of the ruins, is a black wooden cross.

It is rather of better workmanship than those around. It is more substantial-looking, and there is an attempt at rude carving at the extremities of the arms of the cross. The fierce gales which sweep over the district had torn it from its position lately, but reverent hands had reinstated it. It now stands upright, but the words originally painted upon it are but dimly decipherable. Yet, not so very many years ago, it bore the following inscription:

"Sacred . to . the . memory . of . Ellen . Sheridan . who
broke . her . heart . April . 21, . 18—.
R . I . P.

"Mother, ye might let me go to school, the day?"

The half-timid, half-pleading request was uttered by a little Irish peasant girl, of about ten or eleven years of age. Her scanty attire

would have been rejected with disdain by a discerning scarecrow. Shoes and stockings were to her an unknown resource of civilisation, and her thick, straight, matted black hair, fell in jagged masses over her forehead, meeting her heavy black brows, and almost obscuring her eyes. The latter was much to be regretted, for the child's eyes were her only redeeming feature. They were the sweet, deep, violet-blue eyes of the Celt, with long, thick black lashes. In other respects she had no features to speak of, except her mouth, which certainly could not be overlooked, for her family and friends, with charming frankness, repeatedly told her when alluding to that feature, that if it were not for her ears—which certainly proved admirable and formidable barriers—her mouth would have gone round her head.

"Arrah ! then ! how bad ye are, wantin' to go to school. I can't read or write, nor me mother afore me, an' I got on in the world. Mick," to a youngster of about three years old—the senior of two other children, one of which his mother was then nursing—"lave that stirabout pot alone ! School, indeed !" she continued, recurring to the former topic ; "better for ye to stay at home an' mind the childhre."

The little girl threw her hands before her face and began to whimper.

"Come, stop that !" exclaimed Peggy Sheridan, in a peremptory tone. "Be off, out ov this, an' let me av none av yer cryin'. There's scarce enough sayweed in to make manure for the next crap av piaties, so take the ould tin can down an' hape some up down there on the burrow."

"I will, mother ; but can't ye let me go to school, and I'll do it whin I come back ?"

"Troth, ye're enough to vex a saint ! Talkin' av yer school whin there's such hapes of blobby-wore down on the strand that it 'ud be flyin' in the face av Heaven not to gether it !"

Ellen Sheridan, urged thereto by unmistakable evidences upon her mother's part that she was likely to become demonstrative in her anger, left the squalid, untidy, fish-smelling little cabin, which she called her home, and walked slowly down the road with the old tin can in her hand, until she came to the shingle where the glistening, dark brown seaweed lay sparkling in the September sunshine. The tears were yet wet on Ellen's cheeks as she walked listlessly along, cooling her bare feet amongst the slippery seaweed, when some shouts caused her to toss away the mane which hung over her forehead, and, shading her eyes with her hand, she looked up.

A great pang of jealous envy took possession of her soul as she saw four or five boys and girls on their way to the parish school and the Nuns' School. With that inherent demonism, which seems to be common to schoolboys and schoolgirls of all classes, they proceeded to counteract the effects* of their presumably too highly cultivated brains by a little physical exertion.

As her veracious chronicler, we are bound here to state that Ellen Sheridan—ugly, uncouth, ignorant, and sensitive—was a butt for the jeers and taunts of her more audacious compeers. As she looked up, a stone from the group resounded against the tin can, this was followed by another and another, and a peal of jeering laughter from her assailants. Ellen—valiant because she was at some distance from them—stooped to pick up a stone with which to retaliate, when she received a sharp blow just behind her ear, whilst a youth, coming from a field at the other side of the road, set off in pursuit of the vanishing school-children.

"I know every wan av yez," he said, shaking his hand at them as they deftly evaded him, "an' I'll complain av yez to Father Grogan! Did they hit yeh, ochorra? Are yeh much hurted?" he asked kindly, running down the shingle to where Ellen was sitting sobbing bitterly, and trying to staunch the blood with her tattered skirt, for pinafore she had none.

"Yis," she sobbed, "an' it was that Maggie Moran that did it."

"Och! maybe it wasn't, now," he replied in an easy, good-natured voice. Dan Coyle was a good-looking peasant of about eighteen. "Come up to the well in the field, an' we'll wash it, an' put some crowsfeet leaves on it. They're the finest thing out for a cut."

Dan performed the part of surgeon, if not according to the most orthodox fashion, at least kindly and with a good will, and the leaves were bound on by a neat and artistically-tied small hay-rope.

"An' so ye'r goin' to gether blobby-wore, asthore?" he said.

"Yis; but I'd rather be at school," responded Ellen. "I wanted me mother to let me go to-day, for I want to know how to read books."

Dan looked at the dirty, tear-stained little figure before him. It was rather a puzzle to him how anyone could like to go to school. His own father had owned a couple of fishing-boats, and was considered a well-to-do man in the neighbourhood, so that he had been able to spare Dan to go to school, much against his own inclination. However, the result was that Dan had so far advanced up the thorny paths of learning that he knew how to read and write tolerably well. What giddy heights he might have attained in further scaling Parnassus could only be conjectured, as his father and the two fishing-boats were all lost one stormy night when Dan was about thirteen, and he had from thence to do an odd day's fishing or an odd day's field-work, as either presented itself.

"Sorra bit much good it would do yeh, Ellen," he said. "It's betther for yeh to get the sayweed for the crap, for the fishin' was very bad this year, an' God knows the piatees an' a bit av cabbage 'll be wanted. I'll come down an' put some on yer hape at dinner-time."

Ellen soon had a good heap collected. As she toiled on, her busy brain kept time with her busy hands, she forgot all about her accident, and in a voice clear and sweet as a skylark's, she ever and anon

caroled forth scraps of songs and masses, which latter she had picked up in the chapel. The sacred music seemed to be her especial favourite. Her melodies were correct; every note was true; for Ellen was a born musician and possessed such an accurate ear, and such a rare vocal organ as one in a million is ever endowed with. The poor, ignorant, untutored child had some dim yearnings after something brighter and braver in her life. It was this feeling that made her long to learn how to write and read, as she had a firm conviction that she could then, as she said to herself, "know everything."

But Peggy Sheridan was inexorable. Certainly, the herring fishing was bad for many subsequent seasons, and it was hard enough even with the combined labour of the father and the growing up family to keep body and soul together. Moreover, the shifting sands had just commenced to silt up and form a bar across the harbour, so that by the time Ellen Sheridan was sixteen years of age, the Baldoyle fishermen were in woeful plight. During the time there had been but little variation in Ellen's sordid, hardworking life. She fully bore out the promise of her extreme uncouthness, yet people liked Ellen, who was always spoken of as "a quiet, dacent girsha."

The one relaxation of her existence was attending every available service in the chapel. Her apparent piety gained her a good reputation amongst her pastors and neighbours, who little guessed that the chief attractions there were the exquisitely-rendered masses, during which Ellen Sheridan sat enraptured, listening with the soul of an extremely personally ill-favoured St. Cecilia.

Nevertheless, Father Grogan had some shrewd suspicion of the real state of affairs. Meeting Ellen one day, near the chapel, he said brusquely :

"Ellen Sheridan, I think you're very fond of music?" The priest was a thorough musician himself, and to his exertions and example was due the excellence of his choir, which ranked as one of the best in the diocese. Ellen coloured painfully as he addressed her, and her heart beat violently.

"I am, sir," she replied.

"Come in here," he said, entering the chapel, where one or two were practising. "Listen to that," he continued, as they stood at the foot of the ladder leading up to the organ loft.

Ellen listened. They were singing the sweetest of all the Christmas hymns—the immortal "Adeste, fideles"—truly immortal words wedded to immortal song!

They soon all descended from the organ loft, and presently left the chapel. Desiring Ellen to follow him, Father Grogan seated himself at the organ, and said :

"Could you sing—of course without the words, for they are in Latin—the air you have just heard?"

"I could, sir," promptly replied the bewildered and delighted Ellen.

She sang it throughout, Father Grogan playing the accompaniment. Her glorious voice echoed and re-echoed throughout the chapel. Not a single false note could the priest's critical and educated ear detect. As she concluded, he turned to her and asked :

" Ellen—would you like to come and sing in the choir ? "

The girl almost gasped for breath ! Could she have heard aright ?

" Nit me, sir ! "

" Yes—you, Ellen. If you will take this home and learn off the Latin words, I'll get someone to teach you how to pronounce them, and you shall sing in the choir on Christmas day."

Ellen's heart sank. Never before did she regret so bitterly her inability to read ! If Father Grogan knew this defect, he certainly had forgotten it. He did not wait for a reply, but handing Ellen a small piece of music, looked at his watch, and went off quickly.

The girl did not know what to think. A heaven upon earth was prepared for her, did she possess the golden key of knowledge ! She walked slowly out of the chapel, and as she wended her way along the road with the music in her hand, in the dim light she saw approaching her her old acquaintance, Dan Coyle. Almost without knowing what she said, Ellen told the wonderful news to Dan, concluding, with—

" Och ! Dan ! Dan ! if I only could read ! I wish I had your book-larnin."

Dan turned and walked along the road with Ellen. He listened to her lamentations, and presently said slowly and diffidently : " Ellen—shure if it's only to taiche yeh the readin' on the paper, I cud say it ever so often, an' yeh could larn it by heart."

The project was too delightful not to be entertained. Dan Coyle, accompanied Ellen home, and the whole affair was explained to the family.

Ellen was a willing and docile pupil, and soon learnt the words. Father Grogan then took her in hand, and on Christmas Day, Ellen Sheridan, shoeless, stockingless and bonnetless, sang for the first time in public in the choir of Baldyole Chapel.

And thus the winter and early spring passed over. Dan Coyle goodnaturedly spent many an evening in Joe Sheridan's little cabin, sitting out on the shingle, teaching Ellen the words of the Masses and various responses. Also, before the fields were again yellow with the waving corn, Dan Coyle had taught Ellen Sheridan how to love him. The days passed away, in an ecstasy of joy for Ellen—she was learning :

" The lesson of loving,
The sad, sad lesson of loving ;
And all its powers of pleasure or pain
Was slowly, surely proving."

For her happiness was not without alloy. The news that she was to

be married to Dan Coyle soon got noised abroad, and "ugly Ellen Sheridan" was made the theme of many a coarse jest. They at length reached her ears, for those in her station in life are not overburdened with sensitive feelings. The cruel things they said gave the girl exquisite pain—as keen as was the joy with which she had responded to Dan Coyle's request that she would be his wife. Dan Coyle was looked upon with favouring eyes by many a comfortable fisherman's daughter, and by none more favourably than by Maggie Moran—now a fine handsome, bold-looking girl. She was maddened by Dan Coyle's preference for Ellen Sheridan. Industriously and insidiously she circulated reports detrimental to Ellen's good reputation. She took care they should reach Dan Coyle's ears. He never had been very much in love with Ellen Sheridan. He had been attracted by her gentleness, her evident admiration for himself, and her economical, housewifely ways. But he was not strong enough to run the gauntlet of the remarks he heard anent her appearance and character. He did not like to say anything to her on the subject. Like many others, he trusted to time to make all things come straight for him. And thus it came to pass that Dan Coyle's visits to Joe Sheridan's cabin became more infrequent. And Ellen, with a breaking heart, became conscious of "the little rift within the lute" which gradually grew wider and wider.

Yet Ellen made no sign, even when she heard her lover's name mentioned in connection with Maggie Moran, and at length the long, dreary winter evenings came, and Dan Coyle's visits ceased altogether. Ellen could no longer bear the sneers and taunts of her own family, and one wild March morning as she was going to the fields to her daily toil, she met Dan Coyle and spoke to him. "Dan," she said, confronting him, and looking steadily at him, with never a quaver in her voice—"is it thre what I hear, that you're goin' to be married to Maggie Moran?"

Evidently disconcerted by this abrupt and leading question, he did not reply for a minute, and then stammered forth:—"Why then, where did ye hear that, Ellen?"

"From everyone. Dan Coyle, I want to hear from yourself if ye'll want to take back the promise yeh gave me?"

"Och, shure, Ellen," he replied half-ashamed and half evasively, "it was only all foolishness betchune us! There, Ellen!" and he magnanimously held out his hand towards her, "don't let there be any ill-will betchune old friends like us. Shure we both made a mistake."

"Yes," said Ellen, ignoring his proffered hand and pressing her own over her throbbing heart beneath her poor thin shawl; "we both made a mistake." And so saying she passed swiftly on.

With an effort at repression which would have done credit to one reared in a higher social atmosphere, Ellen Sheridan went about her daily tasks as though her heart had not received its death-blow.

She sang as usual every day during Lent, at Vespers in the chapel, and the Thursday before Easter Sunday as she concluded assisting in the solemn and mournful music of the *Tenebre*, she heard the whisper go round as she left the chapel, that Dan Coyle and Maggie Moran were to be married after first mass on Easter Sunday. Ellen Sheridan said nothing, she scarcely seemed to feel anything, her heart felt dead within her. On the Good Friday none threw themselves more fully into the music of the *Stabat Mater*, and Easter Sunday morning found Ellen Sheridan—calm and composed—in her customary seat in the choir.

A glorious Easter Day—the brilliant gleams of the sun typical of the sun that arose and illumined Christendom more than eighteen hundred years ago. It streamed over altar and aisle, where lingered some of the congregation. The organist, with a smile at his choir, commenced playing the *Regina Cœli*, and as he did so a rustic wedding party walked up the aisle.

Ellen Sheridan stood in front of the choir; she saw Dan Coyle and Maggie Moran advance to the altar, there to be made man and wife. As she looked at them she seemed to be nerving herself for a supreme effort, for never before did her splendid voice do such justice to the grand music of Mozart as she sang :—

" *Regina Cœli, lætari! alleluia!*
" *Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia! "*

Scarcely had she come to the last syllable, when she suddenly ceased for a moment, a piercing shriek resounded through the chapel, and Ellen Sheridan with a wailing cry of :—

" Dan! Dan! Dan!" fell senseless, her life-blood flowing from her lips.

In utter consternation all looked wildly around. Heedless of his bride, Dan Coyle rushed up to the organ-loft, and took the girl in his arms. She opened her eyes, and looking at him with a faint smile, said :—

" Dan—you've broke me heart!"

One sigh and all was over.

That Cross at Kilbarrack was carved and erected by Dan Coyle, who never again led a bride to the altar. Maggie Moran, universally execrated by her neighbours, at length left the place, and Dan Coyle yet lives, faithful to the loving memory of Ellen Sheridan, who died for love of him.



THE INVISIBLE HAND.

I CANNOT pretend to explain away or to account for the following incidents. I am not a fanciful or imaginative man, and if ever I thought of "ghosts," or took part in any conversation of which they happened to be the topic, it was always to throw ridicule upon them. That I shall never do again. The sceptical reader may declare that what I am about to relate was the result of a dream or hallucination. I know that I was never in fuller possession of my waking senses, and that I actually saw and went through the following experience.

It is now about seven years ago since the announcement appeared in a local paper that "Shuston Villa," a most desirable, excellently ventilated, and advantageously situated residence, was to be let. I had long been in search of a suitable house for myself and my family, and regularly every day had described a circuit of about seven or eight miles round the fair city of Exeter with the most disheartening results.

It was while plunged in despair at my non-success that the above advertisement one morning attracted the eye of my wife. We eagerly caught at the prospect of such a solution to our difficulty; it seemed a blessing indeed after so much labour spent in vain. The preliminaries were arranged, and in due time we were installed in our new home.

After about a week's sojourn, however, we began to be unpleasantly conscious that to the surrounding inhabitants, and the peasantry in particular, we were regarded with absorbing interest and curiosity; and it was not until Jane, one of our domestics, had captured the heart of a certain son of toil that any clue was afforded to the mystery. Then we learnt for the first time since taking our new residence, that it bore the reputation of being *haunted*.

A former proprietor, so ran the story among the ignorant villagers, had surprised his daughter, one evening, inditing a loving epistle to the son of his enemy; had seized it over her shoulder, and after reading it, had compelled her to write another appointing a meeting in that room that very night. Providing himself with a pistol, the enraged father himself met the young lover, and after bestowing upon him many hot words, presented a loaded revolver at the young man's breast. This probably was done merely to intimidate the hero, but at that very moment the door was flung open by his daughter, who, taking in the terrible situation at a glance, cast herself upon the form of her lover.

This seems to have turned the father's wavering purpose into a fixed determination. At any rate, whether from accident or design,

the pistol went off, and before the wretched man's gaze the next moment were the dying forms of his daughter and his enemy's son. Casting himself wildly before them in passionate grief, the terror-stricken father besought forgiveness. It was too late. No word escaped their cold lips, and ere he could summon assistance he felt upon his brow the brand of Cain.

That night the master of the house disappeared, and some fishermen, rowing on the river the following morning, discovered his body floating down with the tide.

Thus ran this very tragic story; and, as it appeared on further inquiry, our new and enviable residence, unknown to us, had been let and re-let again and again. On each occasion the tenants had quitted it after a very short stay, from some unknown cause, and this had at last given the house the reputation of being in the possession of disembodied spirits.

I was sitting, at half-past eleven, one night, in the latter part of February, in the room I used as my study, busily writing, when my mind in a careless fashion reverted to this superstition concerning "Shunton Villa." I had not been thinking of the story, which seemed in some strange manner to be *borne in* upon my mind. My wife and children and our servants had retired to rest, and my thoughts were undisturbed by the slightest sound. All about the house was as silent as the grave.

At the same moment that I began to recall the legend in the form in which it had reached me, it suddenly flashed across me that I was seated in the very room in which the terrible deed was said to have been enacted.

I am by no means a superstitious man, but the dead silence in the house and the wind moaning among the tall trees without, and the hollow ringing sound produced by my own footsteps whenever I moved to stretch myself, combined with the influence of the supposed witching hour, were calculated to produce a certain sensation of awe even in the most unimaginative of mortals. I again settled myself to my work, but I quickly discovered that it was almost impossible to divert my thoughts from the subject of the haunted room.

My writing—a philosophical treatise that I was preparing for a quarterly review—was spread out on the table before me, and I had bent back upon my chair in a futile endeavour to get again into my train of thought; my eyes meantime, being bent listlessly upon the paper. It was while gazing thus that, to my utter astonishment, I beheld the sheets slowly rise from the table and move forward in the direction of my shoulder as if drawn there from behind me by some Invisible Hand.

The lamp had burnt rather low, and a gentle, subdued light was in the room, and in it I saw distinctly the paper shake and quiver (but without a single rustle or noise of any kind), as if the hand that held it was violently trembling. I felt myself quite powerless either to

move or utter a sound; my tongue became rooted to my mouth, and my hair seemed to assume a perpendicular position.

By a great effort of will I pushed back the chair and rose from my seat and the paper as I did so fell silently upon the table. I drew my handkerchief from my pocket and wiped my forehead, and walked round to where the lamp burned to turn it up. As I did so my eyes fell upon the opposite side of the wall and rested for a moment upon the portrait of the dead master of the house. I involuntarily shuddered, I knew not why, at the sight, and then my gaze dropped to the chair I had just quitted, and behind it I saw, *with the utmost vividness*, the outline of a human form.

The features, as I looked, became plainly visible and were those of the picture on the wall. Transfixed to the spot, my hand resting upon the lamp, unable to move it up, I watched the countenance of the figure and saw that it was convulsed with rage and surprise. For a moment I thought a fearful gaze was fixed upon me, when its hand slowly rose and was shaken furiously at some invisible object apparently in the seat I had left. The expression next changed to one of intense malice and anticipated revenge, and the forefinger pointed to the paper on the table.

Drawing a deep breath, I still gazed at my unearthly visitant. For the moment all fear had left me, and I waited calmly for what was to follow. I assert this most emphatically. From the gestures of the figure there appeared to be another invisible personage in the room whom it was upbraiding. Suddenly a frightful change passed over the distorted features and I beheld written upon them as if it had been stamped in legible letters the word "Murder." My lips tried to cry "Forbear," but no sound escaped them. The horrible despair upon that face which followed, as succeeding some rash deed, was awful to witness, and it haunted me for many a long day after. The figure wrung its hands with a look of unspeakable agony, and to my horror was stealthily turning its eyes full upon me, when the lamp, which up to now had been burning low, suddenly went out and left me in total darkness.

How long I stood there I know not; but at last, with a feeling of faintness, I groped my way to the door and made for my wife's room. She was awakened by my coming upstairs, and in wonderment beheld my staggering gait and pallid countenance; and looked with astonishment at the glass of brandy which I swallowed at a gulp.

In less than a week our excellently situated and enviable residence had lost its tenants and we were numbered amongst the panic-stricken occupiers of the past. Many times after our departure I read that "Shufton Villa" was to be let. But the last time the announcement was varied. Through the medium of the same local paper, a paragraph informed me that "Shufton Villa" was to be pulled down and a church erected on the site out of the bounty of a lately deceased Lord of the Manor.

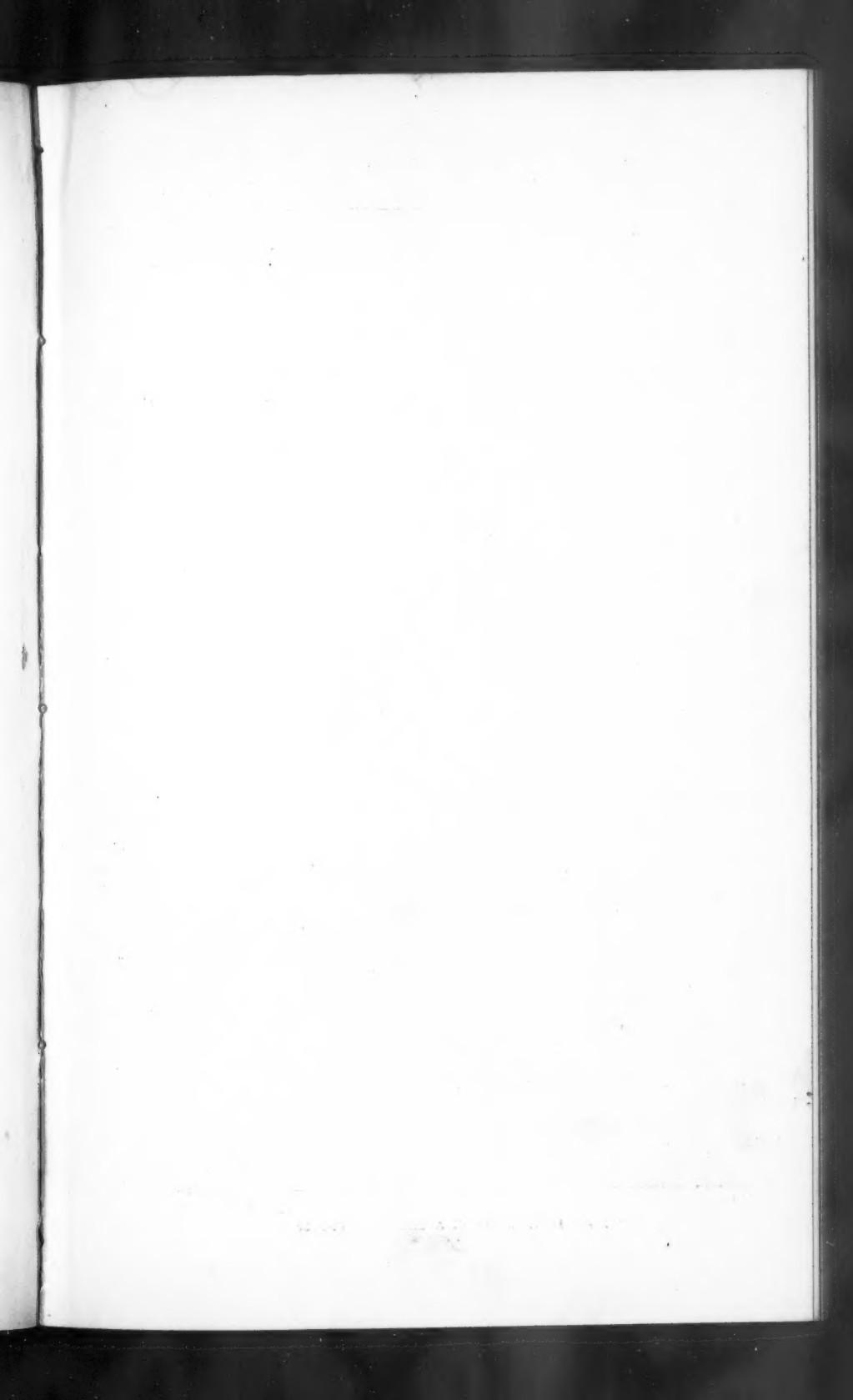
TO MY QUEEN.

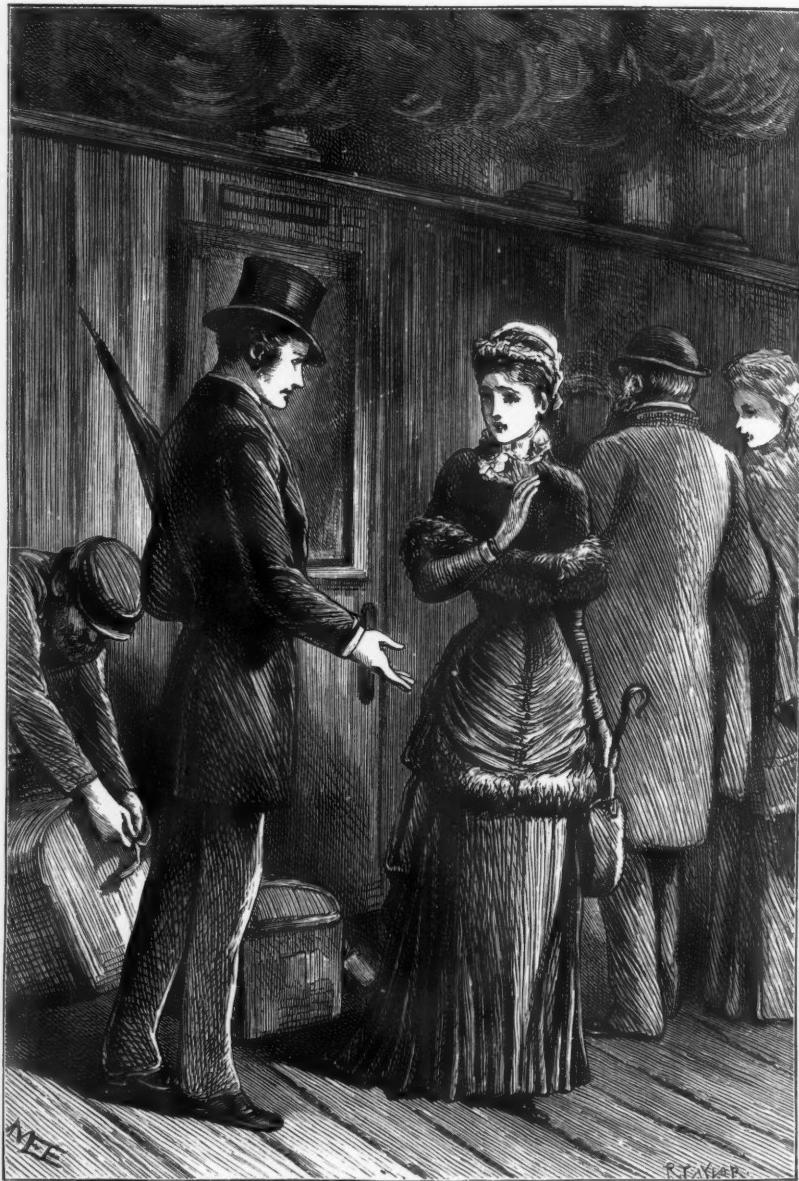
SOFT, as the light of southern moon
 Shining on rippling summer seas,
 Or music of the whispering breeze
 Which stirs the sleeping woods at noon :
 Sweet, as some old familiar strain
 Which fills the trav'ller's eyes with tears,
 After a weary lapse of years
 Of wandering on the billowy main :
 Shine so thine eyes for me, my Queen,
 Sounds so the music of thy voice,
 Which bid my longing heart rejoice
 Far more than all things heard or seen.

Dearer than all the world hath best,
 More dear than any words can say ;
 I think of thee when far away,
 And hush each anxious thought to rest.
 Could I but tell thee all, and see
 An answering message in thine eyes,
 So I might only win the prize
 More dear than all beside to me :
 If but thy voice, so soft and low,
 Whispered love's accents in mine ear,
 If but thine eyes, so bright and clear,
 Looked pityingly on all my woe :

Then, brighter than the southern moon
 Shining on rippling summer seas,
 And softer than the whispering breeze
 That stirs the sleeping woods at noon ;
 Sweeter than vesper-hymns, that rise
 From convent walls, to highest heaven,
 Or distant chiming bells at even
 That tell of peace which never dies ;
 My Queen, thine eyes would shine on me,
 Thy voice would cause my heart to beat,
 And I would cast me at thy feet,
 And give myself, my all, to thee.

F. W. GREY.





M. ELLEN STAPLES.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"I AM HERE TO LOOK AFTER YOU, YOU SEE."